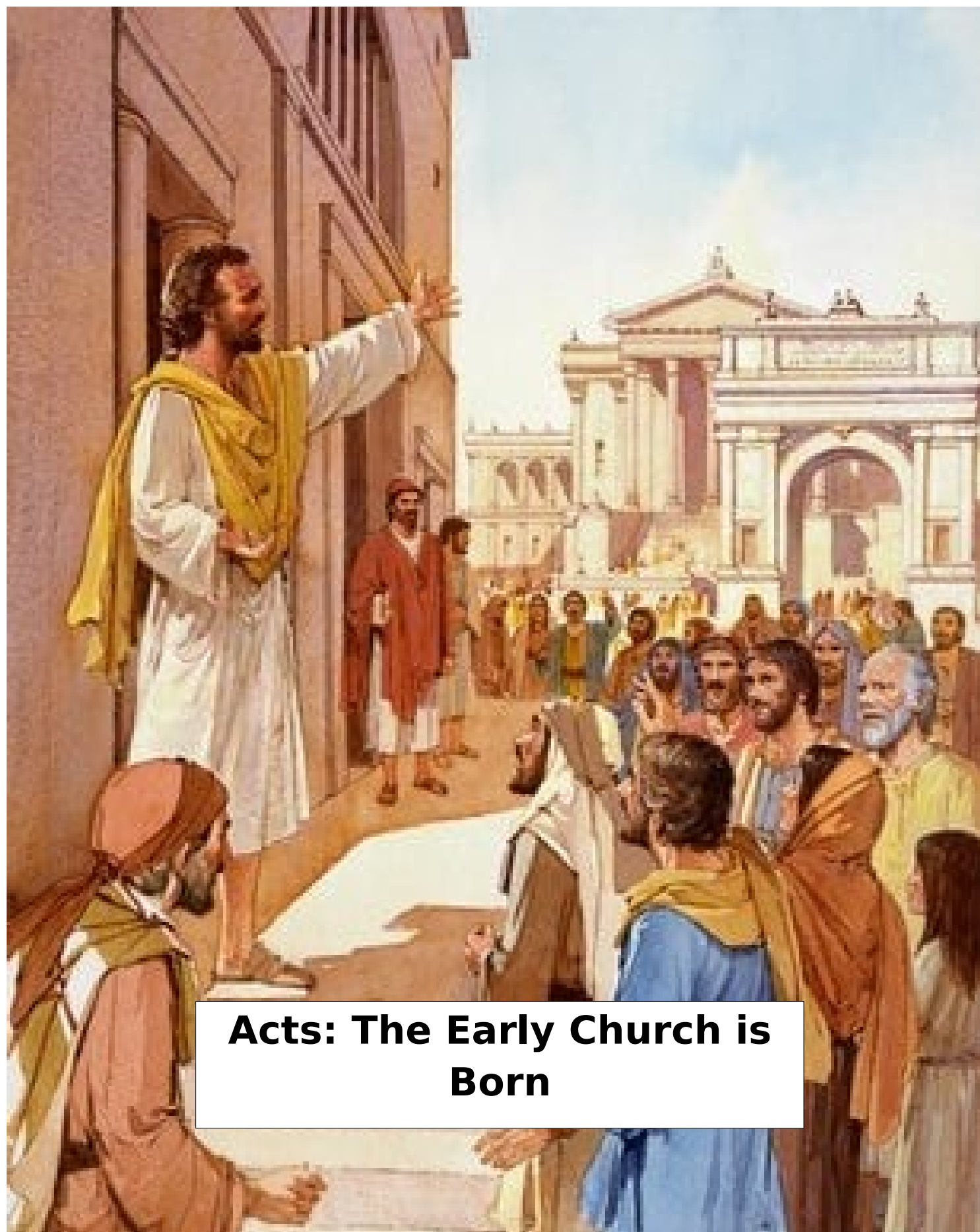




The Book of Acts

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Introduction

The book of Acts is set to be my biggest study to date and I must admit to be a little fearful of doing it justice, I can promise you I will try.

In terms of structure I have decided to start with a helicopter view, a high level overview, and then study the book verse by verse picking out themes and learning's as we go.

The book of Acts a complete animated overview.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CGbNw855ksw>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z-17KxpjL0Q>

The Structure and Authorship

I would like to view Acts as a historical book and see its structure and authorship.

As the second part of the two-part work Luke-Acts, Acts has significant links to the Gospel of Luke. Major turning points in the structure of Acts, for example, find parallels in Luke, the presentation of the child Jesus in the Temple parallels the opening of Acts in the Temple, Jesus' forty days of testing in the wilderness prior to his mission parallel the forty days prior to his Ascension in Acts, the mission of Jesus in Samaria and the Decapolis (the lands of the Samaritans and Gentiles) parallels the missions of the Apostles in Samaria and the Gentile lands, and so on. These parallels continue through both books.

Acts is the only Biblical book that chronicles the history of the church immediately after Jesus' ascension. As such, it provides us with a valuable account of how the church was able to grow and spread out from Jerusalem into the rest of the Roman Empire. In only three decades, a small group of believers in Jerusalem transformed into an empire-wide movement of people who had committed their lives to Jesus Christ, ending on a high note with Paul on the verge of taking the gospel to the highest government official in the land, the Emperor of Rome.

Within the writing itself are some clues as to who the author was:

Luke is the companion of Paul. In the description of the happenings in Acts, certain passages make use of the pronoun "we." At these points the author includes himself as a companion of Paul in his travels (16:10-17; 20:5 -- 21:18; 27:1 -- 28:16). A historian as careful with details as this author proves to be would have good reason for choosing to use "we" in some places and "they" elsewhere. The author was therefore probably present with Paul at the particular events described in the "we" sections.

These "we" passages include the period of Paul's two-year imprisonment at Rome (ch. 28). During this time Paul wrote, among other letters, Philemon and Colossians. In them he sends greetings from his companions, and Luke is included among them.

Although it cannot be proved that the author of Acts was a physician simply from his vocabulary, the words he uses and the traits and education reflected in his writings fit well his role as a physician. It is true that the doctor of the first century did not have as specialized a vocabulary as that of doctors today, but there are some usages in Luke-Acts that seem to suggest that a medical man was the author of these books. And it should be remembered that Paul uses the term "physician" in describing Luke. *Col 4:14 Luke, the beloved physician, and Demas, greet you.*

The date for Luke-Acts is around 62 AD, the time of Paul's imprisonment in Rome.

This date is supported by:

Silence about later events. While arguments from silence are not conclusive, it is perhaps significant that the book contains no allusion to events that happened after the close of Paul's two-year imprisonment in Rome: e.g., the burning of Rome and the persecution of the Christians there (a.d. 64), the martyrdom of Peter and Paul (possibly 67) and the destruction of Jerusalem (70).

No outcome of Paul's trial. If Luke knew the outcome of the trial Paul was waiting for (see 28:30), why did he not record it at the close of Acts? Perhaps it was because he had brought the history up to date.

Luke had a purpose in writing this history, and this purpose influenced the way the book ended.

Act 1:6 When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? Act 1:7 And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. Act 1:8 But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.

Luke wanted to show how the church penetrated the world of his day in ever-widening circles (Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, the ends of the earth) until it reached Rome, the world's political and cultural centre. On this understanding, mention of the martyrdom of Paul (c. a.d. 67) and of the destruction of Jerusalem (70) was not pertinent. This would allow for the writing of Acts c. 70 or even later.

Who is the recipient?

I need to look at both Luke and Acts here for they are written to the same person and that is obvious.

Luk 1:1 Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us, Luk 1:2 Even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eyewitnesses, and ministers of the word; Luk 1:3 It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus, Luk 1:4 That thou mightest know the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed.

Act 1:1 The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, Act 1:2 Until the day in which he was taken up, after that he through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen: Act 1:3 To whom also he shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God: Act 1:4 And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me.

Who is Theophilus? The name means a “friend of God”, we are Theophilus, the letter is for us, or else why are we reading someone else’s letter?

We are Theophilus, a “friend of God”, and Luke is writing to us, it is a lovely thought when you read this book to take it as a personal letter from a friend.

I take the liberty of editing the first verse.

Luk 1:3 It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Michael, Luk 1:4 That thou mightest know the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed. Act 1:1 The former treatise have I made, O Michael, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach,

Luk 1:3 It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Diana, Luk 1:4 That thou mightest know the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed. Act 1:1 The former treatise have I made, O Diana, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach,

Luk 1:3 It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Shelley, Luk 1:4 That thou mightest know the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed. Act 1:1 The former treatise have I made, O Shelley, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach,

This is personal.

Why is the book of Acts Important?

The books of Luke and Acts provide a bridge for the writings of the Old and New Testament. As a second volume to Luke's Gospel, it joins what Jesus "began to do and to teach" as told in the Gospels with what He continued to do and teach through the apostles' preaching and the establishment of the church. Besides linking the Gospel narratives on the one hand and the apostolic letters on the other, it supplies an account of the life of Paul from which we can learn the setting for his letters.

Geographically its story spans the lands between Jerusalem, where the church began, and Rome, the political centre of the empire. Historically it recounts the first 30 years of the church.

This book may be studied to gain an understanding of the principles that ought to govern the church of any age.

In addition to the bridge between the Testaments I also see a bridge between Jesus and His part and the role of the Spirit, which we see introduced early on and witness the handover from Jesus to the Spirit.

Theme and Purpose

It was an ordinary procedure for a historian at this time to begin a second volume by summarizing the first volume and indicating the contents anticipated in his second volume. Luke summarizes his first volume, the theme of his second volume is presented in the words of Jesus.

Act 1:4 And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me.

Act 1:8 But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.

This is, in effect, an outline of the book of Acts.

The Purpose

What was Luke aiming at achieving with the book of Acts? I think he had a number of aims, all of which he achieved.

To present a history.

The significance of Acts as a historical account of Christian origins cannot be overestimated. It tells of the founding of the church, the spread of the gospel and evangelistic efforts in the apostolic pattern. One of the unique aspects of Christianity is its firm historical foundation. The life and teachings of Jesus Christ are established in the four Gospel narratives, and the book of Acts provides a coordinated account of the beginning and spread of the church as the result of the work of the risen Lord and the Holy Spirit through the apostles.

To give a defence.

One finds embedded in Acts a record of Christian defences made to both Jews (e.g., 4:8-12) and Gentiles (e.g., 25:8-11), with the underlying purpose of conversion. It shows how the early church coped with pagan and Jewish thought, the Roman government and Hellenistic society.

Luke may have written this work as Paul awaited trial in Rome. If his case came to court, what better court brief could Paul have had than a life of Jesus, a history of the beginnings of the church (including the activity of Paul) and an early collection of Paul's letters?

To provide a guide.

Luke had no way of knowing how long the church would continue on this earth, but as long as it pursues its course, the book of Acts will be one of its major guides. In Acts we see basic principles being applied to specific situations in the context of problems and persecutions. These same principles continue to be applicable until Christ returns.

To depict the triumph of Christianity in the face of persecution.

The success of the church in carrying the gospel from Jerusalem to Rome and in planting local churches across the Roman Empire demonstrated that Christianity was not a merely human work. It triumphed under the rule of the exalted Christ and through the power of the Holy Spirit.

There are interesting characteristics in the writing of Acts worth considering.

1. Accurate historical detail. Every page of Acts abounds with sharp, precise details, to the delight of the historian and me. The account covers a period of about 30 years and reaches across the lands from Jerusalem to Rome. Luke's description of these times and places is filled with all kinds of people and cultures, a variety

of governmental administrations, court scenes in Caesarea, and dramatic events involving such centres as Antioch, Ephesus, Athens, Corinth and Rome. Barbarian country districts and Jewish centres are included as well. In each instance archaeological findings reveal that Luke uses the proper terms for the time and place being described. Hostile criticism has not succeeded in disproving the detailed accuracy of Luke's political and geographical designations.

2. Literary excellence. Not only does Luke have a large vocabulary compared with other New Testament writers, but he also uses these words in literary styles that fit the cultural settings of the events he is recording. At times he employs good, classical Greek; at other times the Palestinian Aramaic of the first century shows through his expressions. This is an indication of Luke's careful practice of using language appropriate to the time and place being described. Aramaisms are used when Luke is describing happenings that took place in the Holy Land (chs. 1 - 12). When, however, Paul departs for Hellenistic lands beyond the territories where Aramaic-speaking people live, Aramaisms cease.
3. Dramatic description. Luke's skilful use of speeches contributes to the drama of his narrative. Not only are they carefully spaced and well balanced between Peter and Paul, but the speeches of a number of other individuals add variety and vividness to the account. Luke's use of details brings the action to life. Nowhere in ancient literature is there an account of a shipwreck superior to Luke's with its nautical details (ch. 27). The book is vivid and fast-moving throughout.
4. Objective account. Luke's careful arrangement of material need not detract from the accuracy of his record. He demonstrates the objectivity of his account by recording the failures as well as the successes, the bad as well as the good, in the early church. Not only is the discontent between the Grecian Jews and the Hebraic Jews recorded, but also the discord between Paul and Barnabas (15:39). Divisions and differences are recognised (15:2; 21:20-21).
5. Effective use of speeches. One of the distinguishing features of the book of Acts is its speeches. They may be classified as follows: (1) evangelistic - two types: to Jews and God-fearers (2:14-40; 3:12-26; 4:8-12; 5:29-32; 10:34-43; 13:16-41), to pagans (17:22-31); (2) deliberative (1:16-17,20-22; 15:7-11,13-21); (3) apologetic (7:2-52; 22:1-21; 23:1-6; 24:10-21; 25:8,10; 26:2-23; 28:17-20,21-22,25-28); (4) aiming to exhort (20:18-35).

The speeches may not be verbatim reports; any of them can be read in a few minutes. We know, e.g., that Paul at times could be a long-winded preacher (20:7, 9; 28:23). However, studies of these speeches (speakers, audiences, circumstances, language and style of writing) give us reason to believe that they are accurate summaries of what was actually said.

We know this letter is written for and to us which must make us think how can we apply learning's from Acts to our own lives?

What opportunities for sharing the gospel can we take advantage of in the days to come? This question should ring through our minds as we page through the book of Acts. In virtually every chapter, apostles such as Peter and Paul powerfully present the gospel to individuals and groups of people. The apostles portrayed in Acts shine with evangelistic zeal, showing a striking transition from the often misguided disciples of the Gospels. Clearly the apostles' faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus produced a noticeable change in their hearts through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Let us allow Acts to encourage us to walk more closely with God so that we might make Christ's name known with the boldness and the zeal of the apostles and the early church.

Acts Chapter One

Now we have completed our high level look at Acts and we are ready to dive in to the detail.

Acts chapter 1 sets the scene for the whole of the book. Luke has a strong structure and clearly thought about this.

Act 1:1 The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, Act 1:2 Until the day in which he was taken up, after that he through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen: Act 1:3 To whom also he shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God: Act 1:4 And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me. Act 1:5 For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.

Luke explains where he got to with his first book, which is the launching pad for his second. We find the apostles waiting for the Holy Spirit. Imagine being told to wait for something so amazing, they must have been on tenterhooks.

This puts me in mind of our experience now as we wait for the Lord to come at the end times. We also have a promise, but no time frame.

We begin with a treatise, which is a written work, a systematic exposition or argument in writing including a methodical discussion of the facts and principles involved and conclusions reached.

Act 1:2 Until the day in which he was taken up, after that he through the Holy

Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen:

Jesus through the Holy Ghost gave commandments, does this mean that Jesus no longer gave His own message, were the commands He gave during His life from the Holy Spirit or is it the handover point? Once He had been taken up, he communicated via the Holy Spirit whose turn it was to take prominence on earth.

John Gill observes: The phrase, "through the Holy Ghost", may either be read in connection with "had given commandments", as the Vulgate and Arabic versions read, and as we do; and the sense be, that these commands which Christ gave to his apostles, were not merely his orders, as man, but were what the Holy Ghost was equally concerned in with him, and were from him as God, and so carried a divine authority with them; and at the same time that he gave them to them, he breathed into them the Holy Ghost, whereby they had a more clear view of his doctrines and ordinances, and were more qualified to minister them; and besides, had an intimation given them, that they might expect still greater gifts of the Holy Ghost: or it may be read with the latter clause, "whom he had chosen"; as in the Syriac and Ethiopic versions; and then the meaning is, that just before his being taken up to heaven, he gave some special orders and directions to his apostles, whom he had chosen to that office through the Holy Ghost, and not through human affection in him, or according to any desert of theirs; but as under the influence of the Holy Spirit, with which, as man, he was anointed without measure; and whose gifts and graces he communicated to his disciples, to fit them for the service to which they were appointed: or with the apostles; they being sent by the Holy Ghost, as well as by Christ.

Our letter begins with news of a promise.

Act 1:4 And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me. Act 1:5 For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.

We see clearly that the men and women are waiting for the promise of the Father, which is the pouring forth of the Spirit.

When was this promise made? Joel prophesies this and John also records Jesus making this promise.

Joe 2:28 And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions: Joe 2:29 And also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit.

Joh 14:15 If ye love me, keep my commandments. Joh 14:16 And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; Joh 14:17 Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you. Joh 14:18 I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you. Joh 14:19 Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more; but ye see me: because I live, ye shall live also. Joh 14:20 At that day ye shall know that I am in

my Father, and ye in me, and I in you. Joh 14:21 He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him.

The final part of the introduction is a complex one. *Act 1:5 For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.*

Firstly to make it clear Jesus never baptised anyone, He delegated this to His disciples. *Joh 4:1 When therefore the Lord knew how the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John, Joh 4:2 (Though Jesus himself baptized not, but his disciples,)*

Jesus was baptised by His cousin John.

Mat 3:13 Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him. Mat 3:14 But John forbad him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me? Mat 3:15 And Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he suffered him. Mat 3:16 And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: Mat 3:17 And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.

John the Baptist saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him, for this is what was promised to John, as a sign, which should confirm his faith in Jesus, as the true Messiah, and which he himself says he saw, and upon which he based the record and testimony he bore to Christ, as the Son of God.

Joh 1:33 And I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost.

This is interesting, we now know what the disciples are waiting for, but also who is behind it. Their friend Jesus will be doing the Baptisms at last.

Ye shall be baptised with the Holy Ghost; that is, by Himself; for it is Christ's prerogative to baptise with the Spirit, as John foretold of Him, and it designs such an extraordinary and plentiful donation of the gifts of the Spirit, as may be expressed by a baptism; in which the apostles, on the day of "Pentecost", were, as it were, to be immersed.

Notice the wording here they are not to be baptised "by" but "with". This isn't something being done to them by someone it is being totally immersed. In the same way as water baptism was immersive they will be covered head to toe with the Holy Ghost.

The key difference between the water baptism and the Holy Spirit baptism for me is that one is physical and symbolic versus a life changing and Spiritual experience. As we saw physical circumcision replaced by circumcision of the

heart we see our faith becoming less and less about this world and more and more about the next.

I shall cover this subject of baptism in the Holy Spirit later in some detail when Luke talks of the fulfilment of this promise and we see it happen before our eyes.

The Ascension

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ca9LnzJnpjQ>

Having completed the introductions Luke begins his recall.

The Ascension

Act 1:6 When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? Act 1:7 And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. Act 1:8 But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth. Act 1:9 And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight. Act 1:10 And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; Act 1:11 Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.

Jesus was physically present after His resurrection to tell the guys about the promise and to wait and we see that He had a little more to say,

I had always had a picture of these events happening in a room, but the fact that a cloud came and taking into account the next verse I am confident in saying that this took place on the Mount of Olives.

Act 1:12 Then returned they unto Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is from Jerusalem a sabbath day's journey.

I think the Mount of Olives was a place Jesus felt was home when He was a man. *Luk 21:37 And in the day time he was teaching in the temple; and at night he went out, and abode in the mount that is called the mount of Olives.*

The disciples are curious, as is to be expected.

Act 1:6 When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?

The physical kingdom had been for some time taken away from the Jews, Judea was reduced to a Roman province, and was now actually under the power of a Roman governor. And the nation in general was in great expectation, that upon the Messiah's coming they should be delivered from the yoke of the Romans, and that the son of David would be king over them. The disciples of Christ had imbibed the same notions, and were in the same expectation of a temporal kingdom to be set up by their master, as is evident from Matthew.

Mat 20:20 Then came to him the mother of Zebedee's children with her sons, worshipping him, and desiring a certain thing of him. Mat 20:21 And he said unto her, What wilt thou? She saith unto him, Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand, and the other on the left, in thy kingdom.

Jesus' resurrection from the dead, and his discoursing with them about the kingdom of God, and ordering them to wait at Jerusalem, the metropolis of that nation, for something extraordinary perhaps revived their hopes, and emboldened them to put this question to him and this general expectation of the Jews is expressed by them in the same language as here.

In the following verses Jesus explains what will happen after their spiritual baptism.

Act 1:8 But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.

Jesus says that they will be witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria. These three places mentioned are all part of Israel and also mirrors their early missions. Jesus expands the scope of the mission, unto the uttermost part of the earth- now we go global.

These humble fishermen from Galilee who had never left Israel were being sent to all the earth, not a short journey but an epic one with so much unknown. I wonder if they felt the weight of this hanging heavy on them, the fear of the unknown. They must have had a thousand questions, but it is conversation over.

Jesus graciously pre-empts this fear by telling them that they will have power, they are not going alone the power of the Holy Spirit will be with them.

They've been given power before directly from Jesus and this power is now being given by the Holy Spirit.

Mar 6:7 And he called unto him the twelve, and began to send them forth by two and two; and gave them power over unclean spirits;

Luk 9:1 Then he called his twelve disciples together, and gave them power and authority over all devils, and to cure diseases.

The next event would have shocked them into their places and reminded them of the spiritual world and powers above them.

Act 1:9 And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight.

There are two events called the Ascension in our Bibles, one is in Luke. *Luk 24:50 And he led them out as far as to Bethany, and he lifted up his hands, and blessed them. Luk 24:51 And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven. Luk 24:52 And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy: Luk 24:53 And were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God. Amen.*

In Acts we have far more detail.

John Gill says. Christ was "received" by this cloud which descended to meet him, and joining him, escorted him to heaven: at least it may be thought, if it was a real cloud, that there was a multitude of angels in it, which accompanied him to the heavenly regions; for it can hardly be thought that a multitude of the heavenly host should descend at his birth, and sing glory to God upon his coming into this world; and not as large a number attend him with shouts and acclamations, at his going out of it, when he had done his work he came about, and was ascending to his God and Father, to take his place at his right hand on his throne.

This imagery is one we feel we have seen before and this event has clearly been foreshadowed.

The transfiguration saw a cloud.

Mat 17:5 While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him.

Clouds are not negative, rain laden ominous signs in the Bible they are powerful, mysterious and symbolic, a divider between heaven and earth.

I have picked just a few examples.

Gen 9:13 I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth.

Exo 16:10 And it came to pass, as Aaron spake unto the whole congregation of the children of Israel, that they looked toward the wilderness, and, behold, the glory of the LORD appeared in the cloud.

Exo 19:9 And the LORD said unto Moses, Lo, I come unto thee in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with thee, and believe thee for ever. And Moses told the words of the people unto the LORD.

Rev 10:1 And I saw another mighty angel come down from heaven, clothed with a cloud: and a rainbow was upon his head, and his face was as it were the sun, and his feet as pillars of fire:

As the cloud of glory covered the Israelites in the wilderness: and which, as it ceased at the death of Moses, the first prophet; one like unto it appeared at the declaration of Christ, as the greater prophet, spoken of, and typified by Moses. The disciples at its first appearance were overshadowed by it; for Luke adds, *Luk 9:34 While he thus spake, there came a cloud, and overshadowed them: and they feared as they entered into the cloud.* There was such a solemnity and glory in it, as struck their minds with awe and fear, as they gradually came into it.

The next verses echo the transfiguration even more loudly.

Act 1:10 And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; Act 1:11 Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.

If we wonder where heaven is located I think the answer here is “up”!

Who were these two men? Moses and Elijah? The two witnesses? Angels?

We are told they are men. They appeared in white apparel, as the angel at the sepulchre in Mat 28:2 which was a symbol both of their purity and holiness, and of their lustre and glory.

They speak and the disciples are called men of Galilee. not to reproach them with their country, but partly to let them know that they knew them, who they were, and from whence they came; and partly to observe the rich and distinguishing grace of God in choosing such humble persons to be the apostles of Christ, and eyewitnesses of his majesty:

The men are reproved for their curiosity in looking after Christ with their bodily eyes, who was no more in common to be seen this way, but with an eye of faith; and for their desire after his corporeal presence, which they were not to look for; and as if they expected he would return again immediately, whereas his return will not be till the end of the world: and besides, they were not to remain on that spot, or stand gazing there; they were to go to Jerusalem, and abide there, as Christ had ordered, till they should receive the Holy Spirit in an extraordinary way; and then they were to preach a crucified Christ, and declare that he was risen from the dead, and was gone to heaven, and was ordained to be the Judge of quick and dead. This suggests an urgency to get started and begin to follow their instructions, speed is of the essence.

This same Jesus, and not another; the same in person, in body and soul and we have a glimpse into the future in that His return will mirror His passing.

We are told where Jesus has gone, He is received into heaven, which might be matter of grief to them, because of the loss of his bodily presence; though it should have been rather joyful to them, since he was gone to the Father, and as their forerunner, to prepare a place, and make intercession for them.

Remembering Judas

Before we move forward I'd like to go back to the last chapter of Luke and Jesus' final words before He ascended.

Luk 24:44 And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me. Luk 24:45 Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures, Luk 24:46 And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: Luk 24:47 And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. Luk 24:48 And ye are witnesses of these things. Luk 24:49 And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high. Luk 24:50 And he led them out as far as to Bethany, and he lifted up his hands, and blessed them. Luk 24:51 And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven.

We can see a lot of the beginning of Acts written clearly at the end of Luke's Gospel, this joins the two books together nicely.

The disciples begin their final mission without their beloved friend and master. They are not idle in their waiting, but try and make preparation where they can.

Act 1:12 Then returned they unto Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is from Jerusalem a sabbath day's journey. Act 1:13 And when they were come in, they went up into an upper room, where abode both Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew, Philip, and Thomas, Bartholomew, and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon Zelotes, and Judas the brother of James. Act 1:14 These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren.

The men have returned to Jerusalem as commanded and the journey is a short one or a Sabbath's day's journey.

A "Sabbath day's journey" was a unit of distance, equal to about 2/3 of a mile (1 kilometre), that the Jewish leaders limited people to journey on the Sabbath, deeming journeying any further to be "work." Acts 1:12 isn't saying that the apostles respected this man-made law, but simply indicating the distance between Jerusalem and the mount called Olivet.

A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.

Act 1:13 And when they were come in, they went up into an upper room, where abode both Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew, Philip, and Thomas, Bartholomew, and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon Zelotes, and Judas the brother of James.

I think we've heard of this upper room before. Remember when Jesus was preparing to host the Passover meal before His crucifixion?

Mar 14:15 And he will shew you a large upper room furnished and prepared: there make ready for us.

It is not stated explicitly but I believe this is the very same room.

Act 1:14 These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren.

Note that the group are joined by friends and supporters and they join together in prayer, we are not told what they pray for. What would you pray for? Come quickly, give me the strength to do Your will as You would wish? Our Father which are in Heaven...

This one accord shows notable unity. When we saw the disciples in the Gospels, it seemed that they fought and bickered. What had changed? Peter still had the history of denying the Lord; Matthew was still a tax collector; Simon was still a zealot. Their differences were still there, but the resurrected Jesus in their hearts was greater than any difference.

Act 1:15 And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples, and said, (the number of names together were about an hundred and twenty,) Act 1:16 Men and brethren, this scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David spake before concerning Judas, which was guide to them that took Jesus. Act 1:17 For he was numbered with us, and had obtained part of this ministry. Act 1:18 Now this man purchased a field with the reward of iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out. Act 1:19 And it was known unto all the dwellers at Jerusalem; insomuch as that field is called in their proper tongue, Aceldama, that is to say, The field of blood. Act 1:20 For it is written in the book of Psalms, Let his habitation be desolate, and let no man dwell therein: and his bishoprick let another take. Act 1:21 Wherefore of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, Act 1:22 Beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection. Act 1:23 And they appointed two, Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias. Act 1:24 And they prayed, and said, Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, shew whether of these two thou hast chosen, Act 1:25 That he may take part of this ministry and apostleship, from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place. Act 1:26 And they gave forth their lots; and the lot fell upon Matthias; and he was numbered with the

eleven apostles.

This is a sizeable gathering. We can perhaps speculate that this consisted of the now eleven disciples, the 70 second set of disciples which is eighty one and thirty nine others of which our faithful ladies are part.

I love that Jesus' earth mother Mary gets to see her son again and witness this incredible event. It must have been such a comfort to her after seeing His cruel death. We have heard nothing of Joseph since Jesus was 12 in the temple and I think that it would be reasonable to assume he had passed away.

Act 1:16 Men and brethren, this scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David spake before concerning Judas, which was guide to them that took Jesus. Act 1:17 For he was numbered with us, and had obtained part of this ministry.

Peter has never been backwards in coming forwards and as an elder of the group steps up to lead the way. He has realised that there is a scripture which had not been fulfilled and he wants to fix this before the Spirit comes.

Men and brethren, this Scripture had to be fulfilled: Peter's words show wisdom we did not often see in him before. He began by noting that Judas didn't spoil God's plan, he fulfilled it (this Scripture had to be fulfilled). This is something that only wise and mature disciples can see in the aftermath of evil.

What is this scripture that must be fulfilled? We know it was spoken by David and concerns Judas.

The sin of Judas was not only his shame and ruin, but it made a vacancy in the college of the apostles. They were ordained twelve, with an eye *to the* twelve tribes of Israel, descended from the twelve patriarchs and for them *twelve thrones* were designated.

Mat 19:27 Then answered Peter and said unto him, Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore? Mat 19:28 And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

Now being twelve when they were learners, if they were eleven when they were to be teachers, it would occasion everyone to enquire what had become of the twelfth, and so revive the remembrance of the scandal of their society; and therefore care was taken, before the descent of the Spirit, to fill up the vacancy.

The reference to Judas is in Psalms.

Psa 41:9 Yea, mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me.

Psa 109:6 Set thou a wicked man over him: and let Satan stand at his right hand. Psa 109:7 When he shall be judged, let him be condemned: and let his prayer become sin. Psa 109:8 Let his days be few; and let another take his office.

Even many hundreds of years before the event this shows the omniscience, and so the deity of the Holy Ghost, and the divine authority of David's Psalms; as well as the honour that was put upon him to be the instrument by which the Holy Ghost speaks, and to be his amanuensis: the particular referred to, is, "concerning" Judas; who is sometimes called Iscariot, to distinguish him from another apostle of the same name.

The fulfilling of the scriptures should not be a surprise nor that this should be the exit of one of the twelve, for David had not only foretold his sin but Jesus pre-warned them quoting David.

Joh 13:18 I speak not of you all: I know whom I have chosen: but that the scripture may be fulfilled, He that eateth bread with me hath lifted up his heel against me. Joh 13:19 Now I tell you before it come, that, when it is come to pass, ye may believe that I am he.

We see that though Peter did not conceal, but declares the sin of Judas; he did it not in a rough manner, aggravating it, but with much softness and tenderness; though with no design to lessen it, as appears by what follows, and which may be instructive to us in speaking of other men's sins.

Peter had been denying Jesus as Judas betrayed Him and I believe this weighed heavily on him.

He was numbered with us, and had obtained part of this ministry which we are invested with. Many are numbered with the saints in this world that will not be found among them in the day of separation between the precious and the vile. Judas' having obtained part of this ministry was but an aggravation of his sin and ruin, as it will be of theirs who prophesied in Christ's name, and yet were workers of iniquity.

Act 1:18 Now this man purchased a field with the reward of iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out. Act 1:19 And it was known unto all the dwellers at Jerusalem; insomuch as that field is called in their proper tongue, Aceldama, that is to say, The field of blood.

He thought to have purchased a field for himself, as Gehazi did with what he got from Naaman by a lie.

2Ki 5:25 But he went in, and stood before his master. And Elisha said unto him, Whence comest thou, Gehazi? And he said, Thy servant went no whither. 2Ki 5:26 And he said unto him, Went not mine heart with thee, when the man turned again from his chariot to meet thee? Is it a time to receive money, and to receive

garments, and oliveyards, and vineyards, and sheep, and oxen, and menservants, and maidservants? 2Ki 5:27 The leprosy therefore of Naaman shall cleave unto thee, and unto thy seed for ever. And he went out from his presence a leper as white as snow.

It was a Field of Blood not only because Judas spilled his blood there, but also because the field was purchased with the “blood money” given to the betrayer of Jesus.

This proved for Judas a field to bury strangers in; and was he or any of his the better for this? It was to him an unrighteous mammon, it deceived him; and the reward of his iniquity was the stumbling-block of his iniquity.

We see Matthews Account.

Mat 27:3 Then Judas, which had betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, Mat 27:4 Saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood. And they said, What is that to us? see thou to that. Mat 27:5 And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself. Mat 27:6 And the chief priests took the silver pieces, and said, It is not lawful for to put them into the treasury, because it is the price of blood. Mat 27:7 And they took counsel, and bought with them the potter's field, to bury strangers in. Mat 27:8 Wherefore that field was called, The field of blood, unto this day. Mat 27:9 Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying, And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him that was valued, whom they of the children of Israel did value; Mat 27:10 And gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord appointed me.

It is interesting that although Judas didn't buy the field actually himself, it was bought in his name and is considered his deal.

One verse made me curious and John Gill explains.

Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet. Through the purchasing of the potter's field with the thirty pieces of silver, the price that Christ was valued at, a prophecy in the writings of the Old Testament had its accomplishment: but about this there is some difficulty. The evangelist here says it was spoken by Jeremy the prophet; whereas in his prophecy there is no mention of any such thing.

There is indeed an account of his buying his uncle Hanameel's son's field, in Jer 32:7, but not a word of a potter, or a potter's field, or of the price of it, thirty pieces of silver; and that as a price at which he, or any other person was valued; but the passage which is manifestly referred to, stands in Zec11:12, where there are these words.

Zec 11:12 And I said unto them, If ye think good, give me my price; and if not, forbear. So they weighed for my price thirty pieces of silver. Zec11:13 And the LORD said unto me, Cast it unto the potter: a goodly price that I was prised at of them. And I took the thirty pieces of silver, and cast them to the potter in the

house of the LORD.

The removing of this difficulty, it might be observed, that the Syriac and Persic versions make no mention of any prophet's name, only read, "which was spoken by the prophet"; and so may as well be ascribed to Zechariah, as to Jeremy, and better: but it must be owned, that Jeremy is in all the Greek copies, in the Vulgate Latin, Arabic, and Ethiopic versions, and in Munster's Hebrew Gospel. Various things are said for the reconciling of this matter: some have thought that Zechariah had two names and that besides Zechariah, he was called Jeremy; but of this there is no proof. Jerome (y) affirms, that in an Hebrew volume, being an apocryphal work of Jeremy, which was shown him by one of the Nazarene sect, he read these words verbatim: so that though they do not stand in the writings of Jeremy, which are canonical Scripture, yet in an apocryphal book of his, and which may as well be referred to, as the book of Maccabees, the traditions of the Jews, the prophecies of Enoch, and the writings of the Heathen poets. Moreover, Mr. Mede has laboured, by various arguments, to prove, that the four last chapters of Zechariah were written by Jeremiah, in which this passage stands; and if so, the reason is clear, for the citation in his name. But what seems best to solve this difficulty, is, that the order of the books of the Old Testament is not the same now, as it was formerly: the sacred writings were divided, by the Jews, into three parts: the first was called the law, which contains the five books of Moses; the second, the prophets, which contains the former and the latter prophets; the former prophets began at Joshua, and the latter at Jeremiah; the third was called Cetubim, or the Hagiographa, the holy writings, which began with the book of Psalms: now, as this whole third and last part is called the Psalms, Luk 24:44, because it began with that book; so all that part which contained the latter prophets, for the same reason, beginning at Jeremiah, might be called by his name; hence a passage, standing in the prophecy of Zechariah, who was one of the latter prophets, might be justly cited, under the name of Jeremiah.

See Jesus' words here in Like.

Luk 24:44 And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me.

There is a deeper significance of the thirty pieces of silver; the price a servant was valued at.

Exo 21:32 If the ox shall push a manservant or a maidservant; he shall give unto their master thirty shekels of silver, and the ox shall be stoned.

Our servant King was a servant to the end, He died valued as a servant.

We were told (Mt 27:5) that Judas went away in despair, and was suffocated (so the word signifies there, and no more); here it is added (as latter historians add to those who went before) that, being strangled, or choked with grief and horror, he fell headlong, fell on his face (so Dr. Hammond), and partly with the swelling of his own breast, and partly with the violence of the fall, he burst asunder in the midst, so that all his bowels tumbled out. If, when the devil was cast out of a child, he tore him, threw him down, and rent him, and almost killed him (as we

find Mk 9:26; Luk 9:42), no wonder if, when he had full possession of Judas, he threw him headlong, and burst him. The suffocation of him, which Matthew relates, would make him swell till he burst, which Peter relates. he burst asunder with a great noise (so Dr. Edwards), which was heard by the neighbours, and so, as it follows, it came to be known (v. 19): His bowels gushed out; Luke writes like a physician, understanding all the entrails of the middle and lower ventricle.

Act 1:20 For it is written in the book of Psalms, Let his habitation be desolate, and let no man dwell therein: and his bishoprick let another take.

Let his habitation be desolate. This Psalm refers to the Messiah.

Psa 69:20 Reproach hath broken my heart; and I am full of heaviness: and I looked for some to take pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none. Psa 69:21 They gave me also gall for my meat; and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink. Psa 69:22 Let their table become a snare before them: and that which should have been for their welfare, let it become a trap. Psa 69:23 Let their eyes be darkened, that they see not; and make their loins continually to shake. Psa 69:24 Pour out thine indignation upon them, and let thy wrathful anger take hold of them. Psa 69:25 Let their habitation be desolate; and let none dwell in their tents.

Mention is made of their giving him gall and vinegar, and therefore the following predictions of the destruction of David's enemies must be applied to the enemies of Christ, and particularly to Judas. Perhaps he had some habitation of his own at Jerusalem, which, upon this, everybody was afraid to live in, and so it became desolate. The Potters field became a graveyard for strangers.

The substitution of another. His bishopric, or his office (for so the word signifies in general) shall another take, which is quoted from Psalms.

Psa 109:6 Set thou a wicked man over him: and let Satan stand at his right hand. Psa 109:7 When he shall be judged, let him be condemned: and let his prayer become sin. Psa 109:8 Let his days be few; and let another take his office.

With this quotation Peter very aptly introduces the following proposal. We are not to think the worse of any office that God has instituted (whether magistracy or ministry) either for the wickedness of any that are in that office or for the ignominious punishment of that wickedness; nor will God suffer any purpose of his to be frustrated, any commission of his to be vacated, or any work of his to be undone, for the miscarriages of those that are entrusted therewith. The unbelief of man shall not make the promise of God of no effect. Judas is hanged, but his bishopric is not lost. It is said of his habitation, that no man shall dwell therein, there he shall have no heir; but it is not said so of his bishopric, there he shall not want a successor. It is with the officers of the church as with the members of it, if the natural branches be broken off, others shall be grafted in.

Rom 11:17 And if some of the branches be broken off, and thou, being a wild

olive tree, wert grafted in among them, and with them partakest of the root and fatness of the olive tree; Rom 11:18 Boast not against the branches. But if thou boast, thou bearest not the root, but the root thee. Rom 11:19 Thou wilt say then, The branches were broken off, that I might be grafted in. Rom 11:20 Well; because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by faith. Be not highminded, but fear: Rom 11:21 For if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee.

Peter quoting from two separate Psalms, showed why God wanted them to choose another disciple to officially replace Judas.

This was a notable reliance on God's Word. This wasn't the wisdom of man at work, but a principle revealed in Scripture. Also, this is the first time in the New Testament we read that Peter quoted Scripture.

The use of the Old Testament here shows that its relevance and validity remain forever.

Let his habitation be desolate: David, the writer of these quoted Psalms, knew what it was like to be betrayed by another. When David was a fugitive from Saul, a man named Doeg betrayed him (1 Samuel 21-22), and many innocent people died as a result. David may have penned these very words in reference to this betrayer.

A New Disciple

Having presented his problem statement Peter moves from the reasons for replacing Judas to the how, the practicalities!

Act 1:21 Wherefore of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, Act 1:22 Beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection. Act 1:23 And they appointed two, Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias. Act 1:24 And they prayed, and said, Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, shew whether of these two thou hast chosen, Act 1:25 That he may take part of this ministry and apostleship, from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place. Act 1:26 And they gave forth their lots; and the lot fell upon Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles.

Whoever replaced Judas must be one who had been with them since John baptised them, who stayed with them during the days of Jesus' earthly ministry, and who saw the resurrected Jesus.

We find no evidence that these qualifications were discovered either in the Scriptures or by special leading of the Holy Spirit. We might say that they simply used their sanctified common sense. These seemed to be logical, common sense requirements for the successor to Judas' office as disciple.

Their common sense was sanctified because it came as they were in obedience, in fellowship, in prayer, in the Scriptures, and desiring God's will.

This was notable sanctified common sense. It didn't answer everything, but it did narrow it down to two men.

One of these must become a witness with us: The disciples were bold enough to make a decision because they knew from God's Word that this is what He wanted. The apostles did not sense an outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon them; that was yet to come. But God did not leave them without guidance. They knew what to do from the Word. This was the main job of the disciple that would replace Judas. Now that Jesus had ascended to heaven, it was more important than ever to have a witness of His resurrection.

Of course, even if we do sense a special guidance from the Holy Spirit, we still have God's voice permanently established in His Word. Any perceived guidance from the Holy Spirit will never disobey God's written word to us.

Act 1:23 And they appointed two, Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias. Act 1:24 And they prayed, and said, Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, shew whether of these two thou hast chosen, Act 1:25 That he may take part of this ministry and apostleship, from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place. Act 1:26 And they gave forth their lots; and the lot fell upon Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles.

They appeal to God as the searcher of hearts: Observe, When an apostle was to be chosen, he must be chosen by his heart, and the temper and disposition of that. Yet Jesus, who knew all men's hearts, for wise and holy ends chose Judas to be one of the twelve. It is comfortable to us, in our prayers for the welfare of the church and its ministers, that the God to whom we pray knows the hearts of all men, and has them not only under his eye, but in his hand, and turns them which way so ever he will, can make them fit for his purpose, if he do not find them so, by giving them another spirit.

No one can fault all the things they did *before* they cast lots. We must believe that all these things put them into the place where God would truly guide their decision.

We would not make many wrong decisions if we did all the things the disciples did before making big decisions.

The disciples obeyed.

The disciples were in unity and fellowship.

The disciples were in prayer.

The disciples were in the Scriptures.

The disciples wanted to do God's will.

The disciples used sanctified common sense.

The disciples did what Jesus did.

The disciples did what they could do to rely on God.

The Coming of the Holy Spirit

Act 2:1 And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. Act 2:2 And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. Act 2:3 And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. Act 2:4 And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

The Holy Ghost came down at the time of a solemn feast, because there was then a great concourse of people to Jerusalem from all parts of the country, and the proselytes from other countries, which would make it the more public, and the fame of it to be spread the sooner and further, which would contribute much to the propagating of the gospel into all nations. Thus now, as before at the Passover, the Jewish feasts served to toll the bell for gospel services and entertainments.

The Passover and Pentecost are 50 days apart hence pentecosta the 50th day, from penta = 5. It is known as the feast of weeks in the Old Testament.

The Septuagint uses the term *Pentēkostē* to refer to the "Feast of Pentecost" twice; in the Book of Tobit and 2 Maccabees. The term *Pentecost* appears in the Septuagint as one of the names for the Festival of Weeks.

The Septuagint translators also used the word in another sense to signify the year of Jubilee, an event which occurs every 50th year.

Lev 25:9 Then shalt thou cause the trumpet of the jubile to sound on the tenth day of the seventh month, in the day of atonement shall ye make the trumpet sound throughout all your land. Lev 25:10 And ye shall hallow the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof: it shall be a jubile unto you; and ye shall return every man unto his possession, and ye shall return every man unto his family. Lev 25:11 A jubile shall that fiftieth year be unto you: ye shall not sow, neither reap that which groweth of itself in it, nor gather the grapes in it of thy vine undressed. Lev 25:12 For it is the jubile; it shall be holy unto you: ye shall eat the increase thereof out of the field. Lev 25:13 In the year of this jubile ye shall return every man unto his possession.

In the festival of weeks we have the ripe harvest and in the Jubilee we have freedom and the return of the land and captives to their true owner God.

There is also the strong link here to the kinsman redeemer.

Luk 4:18 The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at

liberty them that are bruised, Luk 4:19 To preach the acceptable year of the Lord.

So taking this a step further - Pentecost is the feast of weeks, the Jubilee and is also the acceptable year of the Lord. What time is more fitting for the Holy Spirit to come upon the people amid the fulfilment of so much prophesy?

I promised that the baptism of the Holy Spirit would be covered in some detail and the next two ministries are taken and shared with kind permission from Mike Winnett on this very subject.

The Baptism of the Holy Spirit Part One

John the Baptist prophesied of the Baptism of Jesus which is the Baptism in the Holy Spirit. *Mat 3:11 I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire: Mat 3:12 Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire. Mat 3:13 Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him.*

John's Baptism of repentance marked a transition which was confirmed in Christ. *Act 19:1 And it came to pass, that, while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper coasts came to Ephesus: and finding certain disciples, Act 19:2 He said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost. Act 19:3 And he said unto them, Unto what then were ye baptized? And they said, Unto John's baptism. Act 19:4 Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus.* There is little doubt that faith and the reception of the Holy Spirit were linked in the mind of the Apostle. If the Spirit was not manifest it laid a question upon the nature of Baptism.

Act 1:5 For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence. The primary significance of Acts chapter 1 verse 5 is to be found in the Old Testament, it was given at a time of desolation, a message of hope to a ravished nation. *Joe 2:28 And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions: Joe 2:29 And also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit.* It was given in a time of desolation, a message of hope to a ravished nation. *Joe 2:25 And I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten, the cankerworm, and the caterpillar, and the palmerworm, my great army which I sent among you.*

Captivity is turned.

Joe 3:1 For, behold, in those days, and in that time, when I shall bring again the captivity of Judah and Jerusalem.

Luk 4:18 The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, Luk 4:19 To preach the acceptable year of the Lord.

Luk 4:20 And he closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him. Luk 4:21 And he began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears.

It marks the division of the Old Testament and captivity with the New Testament and the Spirit of freedom.

Rom 8:2 For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.

The phenomenon associated with it was not limited to tongues, but dreams, visions and prophecy. *Act 2:17 And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams.*

It would be of far greater significance to a Jew than a Gentile who would lack the spiritual background of the phenomenon. However it was essential to the purpose of God that Jew and Gentile partook in the same experience to show the unity of the Spirit in the Church.

Act 10:44 While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word. Act 10:45 And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost. Act 10:46 For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God. Then answered Peter. Act 10:47 Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we? Act 10:48 And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then prayed they him to tarry certain days.

The same is true of the Samaritans. *Act 8:14 Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John. Act 8:15 Who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost: Act 8:16 (For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptised in the name of the Lord Jesus.)* So we can suggest that the manifestation of the Holy Spirit was significant as a proof of unity for the expanding Church.

The term Baptism in the Spirit is not used with the Samaritans, rather that the Spirit had not fallen, likewise with respect to the Gentiles, the “falling” of the Spirit is given. *Act 10:44 While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word.* However the effect of the phenomenon leaves little doubt in Peter’s mind that the same thing had happened as the “Baptism in the Spirit.

Now are we correct to presume that this phenomenon is the same as that which is associated with the range of gifts, the charismata in Corinthians? *1Co 12:4 Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. 1Co 12:5 And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. 1Co 12:6 And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all. 1Co 12:7 But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal.*

Are we correct to presume that the Baptism of the Spirit was to remain a permanent ability to speak, prophecy or dream? To be baptised in water does not mean that one is permanently wet. The Spirit of God may overcome a man on numerous occasions. *Act 4:31 And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness.*

This was a New Testament occurrence, however the Old Testament sees it on a far grander scale. *1Sa 19:20 And Saul sent messengers to take David: and when they saw the company of the prophets prophesying, and Samuel standing as appointed over them, the Spirit of God was upon the messengers of Saul, and they also prophesied. 1Sa 19:21 And when it was told Saul, he sent other messengers, and they prophesied likewise. And Saul sent messengers again the third time, and they prophesied also.*

Now I am not saying that the gifts are not received in a spectacular way or that they are an infrequent occurrence. I am merely pointing out that it is not absolutely clear that the giving of permanent gifts is associated with the Baptism in the Spirit.

One thing is clear, Baptism in the Holy Spirit is related to outreach and growth and gifts of the Spirit relate to in-reach and growth of the body.

The Baptism of the Holy Spirit Part Two

The experience of Smith Wigglesworth (Pages 25 and 79) whether or not you can fit it in with spiritual experience remains to be seen. The Acts experience is the tip of an iceberg. *Act 2:4 And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.*

Before seeing whether “baptism” in the spirit is connected with the gifts of the spirit, in particularly tongues, let us look at its occurrence.

Mat 3:11 I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire. Mat 3:12 Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.

Mar 1:8 I indeed have baptized you with water: but he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost.

Luk 3:16 John answered, saying unto them all, I indeed baptize you with water; but one mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire.

Joh 1:33 And I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost.

Act 1:5 For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.

Act 11:16 Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how that he said, John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost.

The point to observe is that the baptism in the Holy Ghost is set over against John’s baptism in water.

Clear in John’s baptism the medium is water, in Jesus’ case the medium is the spirit. I wonder to what extent the “sprinklers” desire the spirit, a flood or a drip?

We see that Acts chapter 2 is without question the baptism in the Holy Ghost promised. *Act 10:44 While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word. Act 10:45 And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost. Act 10:46 For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God. Then answered Peter, Act 10:47 Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we? Act 10:48 And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then prayed they him to tarry certain days. Act 11:16 Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how that he said, John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost. Act 11:17 Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as he did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God? Act 11:18 When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.*

Observation:

1. The principle phenomena = other tongues. Clearly in Acts the dialects are from known languages (see introduction to Ecclesiastes where this is a language other than Hebrew). *Act 2:5 And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven. Act 2:6 Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language. Act 10:46 For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God. Then answered Peter.* It remains to be seen if this is the permanent gift of 1 Corinthians chapter 12 and if the phenomena of baptism in the Holy Ghost are true for all ages.
2. Conditions of Acts chapter 2. All together in one place, sitting not kneeling – no mention of the upper room or prayer.
3. Sound and vision. Violent wind and tongues of fire, these phenomena appear left out of modern experience.
4. Fire upon EACH one, all filled with the Holy Spirit.
5. The direction. Out of heaven, not from a man's hands, not by mans request, but by God's promise. *Luk 24:48 And ye are witnesses of these things.*
6. It outworks to Jews/Gentiles, proselytes.
7. The tongues witness to strangers the power of God and magnify God. *Act 10:46 For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God. Then answered Peter.*

The explanation of the phenomena is the key to our understanding. It lies in the prophecy of Joel, because he spoke of this event.

We will now consider what the breakdown is of Joel's prophecy and what is the significance to us today?

Joel – the significance as quoted by Peter in Acts.

1. Its position in the Jewish cannon makes it an early work between 800 and 900 BC or about the time of Isaiah 700 BC. There is no internal evidence to date it but its authenticity is apostolically confirmed.
2. It speaks of the Triune God in a prophetic sense. If it is the earliest prophecy, it marks the change in revelation whereby God exhorts not just the nation of the day, but the nation in the future, like Isaiah chapter 40 and Ezekiel chapter 40.
3. Structure.
 - a. Call to hear. *Joe 1:2 Hear this, ye old men, and give ear, all ye inhabitants of the land. Hath this been in your days, or even in the days of your fathers? Joe 1:3 Tell ye your children of it, and let your children tell their children, and their children another generation.*
 - b. Judgements inflicted. *Joe 1:4 That which the palmerworm hath left hath the locust eaten; and that which the locust hath left hath the cankerworm eaten; and that which the cankerworm hath left hath the caterpillar eaten. Joe 1:5 Awake, ye drunkards, and weep; and howl, all ye drinkers of wine, because of the new wine; for it is cut off from your mouth. Joe 1:6 For a nation is come up upon my land, strong, and without number, whose teeth are the teeth of a lion, and he hath the cheek teeth of a great lion. Joe 1:7 He hath laid my vine waste, and barked my fig tree: he hath made it clean bare, and cast it away; the branches thereof are made white. Joe 1:8 Lament*

like a virgin girded with sackcloth for the husband of her youth. Joe 1:9 The meat offering and the drink offering is cut off from the house of the LORD; the priests, the LORD'S ministers, mourn. Joe 1:10 The field is wasted, the land mourneth; for the corn is wasted: the new wine is dried up, the oil languisheth. Joe 1:11 Be ye ashamed, O ye husbandmen; howl, O ye vinedressers, for the wheat and for the barley; because the harvest of the field is perished. Joe 1:12 The vine is dried up, and the fig tree languisheth; the pomegranate tree, the palm tree also, and the apple tree, even all the trees of the field, are withered: because joy is withered away from the sons of men. Joe 1:13 Gird yourselves, and lament, ye priests: howl, ye ministers of the altar: come, lie all night in sackcloth, ye ministers of my God: for the meat offering and the drink offering is withholden from the house of your God.

- c. *Call to repent. Joe 1:14 Sanctify ye a fast, call a solemn assembly, gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land into the house of the LORD your God, and cry unto the LORD, Joe 1:15 Alas for the day! for the day of the LORD is at hand, and as a destruction from the Almighty shall it come. Joe 1:16 Is not the meat cut off before our eyes, yea, joy and gladness from the house of our God? Joe 1:17 The seed is rotten under their clods, the garners are laid desolate, the barns are broken down; for the corn is withered. Joe 1:18 How do the beasts groan! the herds of cattle are perplexed, because they have no pasture; yea, the flocks of sheep are made desolate. Joe 1:19 O LORD, to thee will I cry: for the fire hath devoured the pastures of the wilderness, and the flame hath burned all the trees of the field. Joe 1:20 The beasts of the field cry also unto thee: for the rivers of waters are dried up, and the fire hath devoured the pastures of the wilderness. Joe 2:1 Blow ye the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in my holy mountain: let all the inhabitants of the land tremble: for the day of the LORD cometh, for it is nigh at hand; Joe 2:2 A day of darkness and of gloominess, a day of clouds and of thick darkness, as the morning spread upon the mountains: a great people and a strong; there hath not been ever the like, neither shall be any more after it, even to the years of many generations. Joe 2:3 A fire devoureth before them; and behind them a flame burneth: the land is as the garden of Eden before them, and behind them a desolate wilderness; yea, and nothing shall escape them. Joe 2:4 The appearance of them is as the appearance of horses; and as horsemen, so shall they run. Joe 2:5 Like the noise of chariots on the tops of mountains shall they leap, like the noise of a flame of fire that devoureth the stubble, as a strong people set in battle array. Joe 2:6 Before their face the people shall be much pained: all faces shall gather blackness. Joe 2:7 They shall run like mighty men; they shall climb the wall like men of war; and they shall march every one on his ways, and they shall not break their ranks: Joe 2:8 Neither shall one thrust another; they shall walk every one in his path: and when they fall upon the sword, they shall not be wounded. Joe 2:9 They shall run to and fro in the city; they shall run upon the wall, they shall climb up upon the houses; they shall enter in at the windows like a thief. Joe 2:10 The earth shall quake before them; the heavens shall tremble: the sun and the moon shall be dark, and the stars shall withdraw their shining: Joe 2:11 And the LORD shall utter his voice before his army: for his camp is very*

great: for he is strong that executeth his word: for the day of the LORD is great and very terrible; and who can abide it? Joe 2:12 Therefore also now, saith the LORD, turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning: Joe 2:13 And rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the LORD your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil. Joe 2:14 Who knoweth if he will return and repent, and leave a blessing behind him; even a meat offering and a drink offering unto the LORD your God? Joe 2:15 Blow the trumpet in Zion, sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly: Joe 2:16 Gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders, gather the children, and those that suck the breasts: let the bridegroom go forth of his chamber, and the bride out of her closet. Joe 2:17 Let the priests, the ministers of the LORD, weep between the porch and the altar, and let them say, Spare thy people, O LORD, and give not thine heritage to reproach, that the heathen should rule over them: wherefore should they say among the people, Where is their God?

- d. Judgements removed. Joe 2:18 Then will the LORD be jealous for his land, and pity his people. Joe 2:19 Yea, the LORD will answer and say unto his people, Behold, I will send you corn, and wine, and oil, and ye shall be satisfied therewith: and I will no more make you a reproach among the heathen: Joe 2:20 But I will remove far off from you the northern army, and will drive him into a land barren and desolate, with his face toward the east sea, and his hinder part toward the utmost sea, and his stink shall come up, and his ill savour shall come up, because he hath done great things. Joe 2:21 Fear not, O land; be glad and rejoice: for the LORD will do great things. Joe 2:22 Be not afraid, ye beasts of the field: for the pastures of the wilderness do spring, for the tree beareth her fruit, the fig tree and the vine do yield their strength. Joe 2:23 Be glad then, ye children of Zion, and rejoice in the LORD your God: for he hath given you the former rain moderately, and he will cause to come down for you the rain, the former rain, and the latter rain in the first month. Joe 2:24 And the floors shall be full of wheat, and the fats shall overflow with wine and oil. Joe 2:25 And I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten, the cankerworm, and the caterpillar, and the palmerworm, my great army which I sent among you. Joe 2:26 And ye shall eat in plenty, and be satisfied, and praise the name of the LORD your God, that hath dealt wondrously with you: and my people shall never be ashamed. Joe 2:27 And ye shall know that I am in the midst of Israel, and that I am the LORD your God, and none else: and my people shall never be ashamed. Joe 2:28 And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions: Joe 2:29 And also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit. Joe 2:30 And I will shew wonders in the heavens and in the earth, blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke. Joe 2:31 The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and the terrible day of the LORD come. Joe 2:32 And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the LORD shall be delivered: for in mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance, as the LORD hath said,

and in the remnant whom the LORD shall call. Joe 3:1 For, behold, in those days, and in that time, when I shall bring again the captivity of Judah and Jerusalem, Joe 3:2 I will also gather all nations, and will bring them down into the valley of Jehoshaphat, and will plead with them there for my people and for my heritage Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations, and parted my land. Joe 3:3 And they have cast lots for my people; and have given a boy for an harlot, and sold a girl for wine, that they might drink. Joe 3:4 Yea, and what have ye to do with me, O Tyre, and Zidon, and all the coasts of Palestine? will ye render me a recompence? and if ye recompense me, swiftly and speedily will I return your recompence upon your own head; Joe 3:5 Because ye have taken my silver and my gold, and have carried into your temples my goodly pleasant things: Joe 3:6 The children also of Judah and the children of Jerusalem have ye sold unto the Grecians, that ye might remove them far from their border. Joe 3:7 Behold, I will raise them out of the place whither ye have sold them, and will return your recompence upon your own head: Joe 3:8 And I will sell your sons and your daughters into the hand of the children of Judah, and they shall sell them to the Sabeans, to a people far off: for the LORD hath spoken it. Joe 3:9 Proclaim ye this among the Gentiles; Prepare war, wake up the mighty men, let all the men of war draw near; let them come up: Joe 3:10 Beat your plowshares into swords, and your pruninghooks into spears: let the weak say, I am strong. Joe 3:11 Assemble yourselves, and come, all ye heathen, and gather yourselves together round about: thither cause thy mighty ones to come down, O LORD. Joe 3:12 Let the heathen be wakened, and come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat: for there will I sit to judge all the heathen round about. Joe 3:13 Put ye in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe: come, get you down; for the press is full, the fats overflow; for their wickedness is great. Joe 3:14 Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision: for the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision. Joe 3:15 The sun and the moon shall be darkened, and the stars shall withdraw their shining. Joe 3:16 The LORD also shall roar out of Zion, and utter his voice from Jerusalem; and the heavens and the earth shall shake: but the LORD will be the hope of his people, and the strength of the children of Israel. Joe 3:17 So shall ye know that I am the LORD your God dwelling in Zion, my holy mountain: then shall Jerusalem be holy, and there shall no strangers pass through her any more. Joe 3:18 And it shall come to pass in that day, that the mountains shall drop down new wine, and the hills shall flow with milk, and all the rivers of Judah shall flow with waters, and a fountain shall come forth of the house of the LORD, and shall water the valley of Shittim. Joe 3:19 Egypt shall be a desolation, and Edom shall be a desolate wilderness, for the violence against the children of Judah, because they have shed innocent blood in their land. Joe 3:20 But Judah shall dwell for ever, and Jerusalem from generation to generation. Joe 3:21 For I will cleanse their blood that I have not cleansed: for the LORD dwelleth in Zion.

- e. The symbols: The locusts and the darkness. Exo 10:12 And the LORD said unto Moses, Stretch out thine hand over the land of Egypt for the locusts, that they may come up upon the land of Egypt, and eat every herb of the land, even all that the hail hath

left. Exo 10:22 And Moses stretched forth his hand toward heaven; and there was a thick darkness in all the land of Egypt three days. God's plagues on a sinful nation culminating in the Passover and judgement of firstborns. Here the mention of God's messengers of wrath and torment. Rev 9:3 And there came out of the smoke locusts upon the earth: and unto them was given power, as the scorpions of the earth have power. Perhaps John the Baptist eating locusts, clean animals was symbolic of wrath consumed? Lev 11:22 Even these of them ye may eat; the locust after his kind, and the bald locust after his kind, and the beetle after his kind, and the grasshopper after his kind.

The history of the Jewish nation is one of conflict with God's righteousness. *Lev 26:21 And if ye walk contrary unto me, and will not hearken unto me; I will bring seven times more plagues upon you according to your sins. Lev 26:22 I will also send wild beasts among you, which shall rob you of your children, and destroy your cattle, and make you few in number; and your high ways shall be desolate. Lev 26:23 And if ye will not be reformed by me by these things, but will walk contrary unto me; Lev 26:24 Then will I also walk contrary unto you, and will punish you yet seven times for your sins. Deu 28:58 If thou wilt not observe to do all the words of this law that are written in this book, that thou mayest fear this glorious and fearful name, THE LORD THY GOD. In Joel we are at a crisis stage.*

The Terrible Day of the Lord

Repentance of heart is not external and is wanted because the "terrible day of Jehovah is coming.

Joe 2:13 And rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the LORD your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil. Joe 2:31 The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and the terrible day of the LORD come.

In the midst of God's judgements we see mercy extended in a way in the valley, an escape route. The transition occurs after verse 17 compare with Malachi, where is thy God?

Mal 2:17 Ye have wearied the LORD with your words. Yet ye say, Wherein have we wearied him? When ye say, Every one that doeth evil is good in the sight of the LORD, and he delighteth in them; or, Where is the God of judgment?

The second chapter Joel promises clearly a restoration in Old Testament terms (the New Testament does not make it physical i.e. fruitfulness of the land, wine and oil).

Joe 2:25 And I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten, the cankerworm, and the caterpillar, and the palmerworm, my great army which I sent among you.

Clearly in Old Testament terms this implies the reestablishment of righteousness as the condition for prosperity.

Deu 30:1 And it shall come to pass, when all these things are come upon thee, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before thee, and thou shalt call them to mind among all the nations, whither the LORD thy God hath driven thee, Deu 30:2 And shalt return unto the LORD thy God, and shalt obey his voice according to all that I command thee this day, thou and thy children, with all thine heart, and with all thy soul; Deu 30:3 That then the LORD thy God will turn thy captivity, and have compassion upon thee, and will return and gather thee from all the nations, whither the LORD thy God hath scattered thee. Deu 30:4 If any of thine be driven out unto the outmost parts of heaven, from thence will the LORD thy God gather thee, and from thence will he fetch thee: Deu 30:5 And the LORD thy God will bring thee into the land which thy fathers possessed, and thou shalt possess it; and he will do thee good, and multiply thee above thy fathers. Deu 30:6 And the LORD thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live.

The captivity will be turned.

The text of Joel 2:23 presents certain problems but Niel, Hengstenberg, Wordsworth et al take it to be teacher of righteousness, the cause of the rain.

Joe 2:23 Be glad then, ye children of Zion, and rejoice in the LORD your God: for he hath given you the former rain moderately, and he will cause to come down for you the rain, the former rain, and the latter rain in the first month.

This is in clear harmony with the following outpouring of the spirit.

Deu 10:13 And it shall come to pass, if ye shall hearken diligently unto my commandments which I command you this day, to love the LORD your God, and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul, Deu 10:14 That I will give you the rain of your land in his due season, the first rain and the latter rain, that thou mayest gather in thy corn, and thy wine, and thine oil.

Joel shows a number of things connected with God's bounty in restoring Judah.

1. The outpouring of God's spirit on all flesh. Peter cannot understand it in Acts, though it clearly extends to the Gentiles. Men of God may speak in the Spirit without understanding.
2. The deliverance of God's people who call upon him.
3. Entering into judgement with the nations.

Just as God had judged Egypt and caused the people deliverance with signs and wonders. Christ in Luke chapter 9 speaks of His Exodus.

700 years later Peter gives the pronouncement of the prophecy coming to fruition that which had encouraged the church was now to be realised in practice. The shame of the nation, the judgements upon the nation were now to be liquidated. Sins no more wicked, but capable of being perfect.

Rom 3:25 Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God.

Heb 9:9 Which was a figure for the time then present, in which were offered both gifts and sacrifices, that could not make him that did the service perfect, as pertaining to the conscience.

Power was given from on high. The day of salvation was nigh!

To further understand the meaning of baptism of the Holy Ghost by Christ we must understand the significance of the Holy Ghost under the Old Testament, the measure of His grace and presence and in what senses He was given to the saints, prophets and priests of Jehovah.

It is really a study of the person and work of the Holy Spirit.

We saw that the baptism in the Holy Spirit was expected by the Jews being part of a prophetic message. It is collateral with the forgiveness of Jehovah and the establishment of righteousness, indicated under the symbols of national prosperity (in Joel).

As God restored the savaged nation, He would pour His spirit out upon ALL flesh, Jew and Gentile.

The Old Testament does not only minister to its own generation, but often only to us of the New Covenant.

1Pe 1:10 Of which salvation the prophets have enquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: 1Pe 1:11 Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow. 1Pe 1:12 Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into.

Joel has according to Peter significance to the New Testament generations only, consequent to glorification of Jesus (John chapter 7).

The final question on the baptism in the Holy Spirit is what it should practically mean.

The concept is firmly grounded in the Old Testament usage, both practical and prophetic. Firstly can we distinguish between the outpouring and indwelling of the Spirit? I.e. the Spirit upon versus the Spirit within.

There is a difference between the regenerative function of the Holy Ghost and the giving of the power of the Spirit, where the believers already in Christ (by His spirit) are filled to speak boldly.

Heb 10:15 Whereof the Holy Ghost also is a witness to us: for after that he had said before, Heb 10:16 This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them; Heb 10:17 And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more.

Act 4:31 And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness.

The regenerative function I take here not specifically to deal with the new birth, but the whole process culminating in the arrival at the measure and stature of Christ, which is the work of the Holy Ghost.

By distinguishing between the enabling or empowering grace of the Holy Spirit and His regenerative work we may explain the nature of the spirits dealing with Saul and David.

- Saul becomes a prophet. *1Sa 10:6 And the Spirit of the LORD will come upon thee, and thou shalt prophesy with them, and shalt be turned into another man. 1Sa 10:10 And when they came thither to the hill, behold, a company of prophets met him; and the Spirit of God came upon him, and he prophesied among them.*
- Kindles his anger. *1Sa 11:6 And the Spirit of God came upon Saul when he heard those tidings, and his anger was kindled greatly.*
- Associated with David's anointing following Saul's rejection and God's repentance. *1Sa 16:13 Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the midst of his brethren: and the Spirit of the LORD came upon David from that day forward. So Samuel rose up, and went to Ramah.*
- The spirit departs from Saul. *1Sa 16:14 But the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the LORD troubled him.*

This is not in anywise implying a regenerative work in Saul or David, but the equipping for office as God's ministers over the nation. For this reason David implores God not to remove His spirit. *Psa 51:15 O Lord, open thou my lips; and my mouth shall shew forth thy praise.* If this Psalm follows the adultery with Bathsheba as far as the sin went David was forgiven. *2Sa 12:13 And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the LORD. And Nathan said unto David, The LORD also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die.* The elect may sin, but the saving effectual grace of God will never desert them.

Balaam was equipped for his prophetic tasks and does not appear from Jude to have been among the righteous. *Num 24:2 And Balaam lifted up his eyes, and he saw Israel abiding in his tents according to their tribes; and the spirit of God came upon him. Jud 1:11 Woe unto them! for they have gone in the way of Cain,*

and ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward, and perished in the gainsaying of Core.

God may pour His spirit upon the craftsmen or the king for whatever purpose He desires. *Exo 31:3 And I have filled him with the spirit of God, in wisdom, and in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship, Exo 31:4 To devise cunning works, to work in gold, and in silver, and in brass, Exo 31:5 And in cutting of stones, to set them, and in carving of timber, to work in all manner of workmanship. Isa 45:1 Thus saith the LORD to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden, to subdue nations before him; and I will loose the loins of kings, to open before him the two leaved gates; and the gates shall not be shut.* This may explain the people of Matthew chapter 7 having the power of God without righteousness.

In the book of Judges: Othniel is equipped for War. *Jdg 3:10 And the Spirit of the LORD came upon him, and he judged Israel, and went out to war: and the LORD delivered Chushanrishathaim king of Mesopotamia into his hand; and his hand prevailed against Chushanrishathaim.* Gideon to save Israel. *Jdg 6:34 But the Spirit of the LORD came upon Gideon, and he blew a trumpet; and Abiezer was gathered after him.* Jephthah upon the rough Christians. *Jdg 11:29 Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon Jephthah, and he passed over Gilead, and Manasseh, and passed over Mizpeh of Gilead, and from Mizpeh of Gilead he passed over unto the children of Ammon.*

Samson's strength departs for his disobedience. Samson's strength is associated with the spirit coming upon him.

Jdg 13:6 Then the woman came and told her husband, saying, A man of God came unto me, and his countenance was like the countenance of an angel of God, very terrible: but I asked him not whence he was, neither told he me his name.

Jdg 14:19 And the Spirit of the LORD came upon him, and he went down to Ashkelon, and slew thirty men of them, and took their spoil, and gave change of garments unto them which expounded the riddle. And his anger was kindled, and he went up to his father's house.

Jdg 15:14 And when he came unto Lehi, the Philistines shouted against him: and the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon him, and the cords that were upon his arms became as flax that was burnt with fire, and his bands loosed from off his hands.

Jdg 16:20 And she said, The Philistines be upon thee, Samson. And he awoke out of his sleep, and said, I will go out as at other times before, and shake myself. And he wist not that the LORD was departed from him.

God reveals through an agent His blessing and will be coming upon him. I.e. Amasai the elders of Israel.

1Ch 12:18 Then the spirit came upon Amasai, who was chief of the captains, and he said, Thine are we, David, and on thy side, thou son of Jesse: peace, peace be unto thee, and peace be to thine helpers; for thy God helpeth thee. Then David received them, and made them captains of the band.

Num 11:17 And I will come down and talk with thee there: and I will take of the spirit which is upon thee, and will put it upon them; and they shall bear the burden of the people with thee, that thou bear it not thyself alone.

Num 11:29 And Moses said unto him, Enviest thou for my sake? would God that all the LORD'S people were prophets, and that the LORD would put his spirit upon them!

We may distinguish the work of “the Spirit upon” as working for civil or ecclesiastical purposes. I think the particular relevance of the New Testament is to enable God’s people to be fitted as prophets, priests and kings (1 Peter chapter 2) and to give them sufficient power for the tasks granted. Not on a limited scale but on a nationwide basis. The proof of baptism is not seen in the possession of miraculous gifts but in the promise of Christ. The Spirit will thus in His own peculiar way fit us for all works that the father lays upon. We have no right to expect the retention of power if we are in error, but we should not confuse this with the withdrawal of saving grace and falling from salvation.

The Diaspora Return

Act 2:5 And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven. Act 2:6 Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language. Act 2:7 And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galilaeans? Act 2:8 And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born? Act 2:9 Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judaea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia, Act 2:10 Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes, Act 2:11 Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God. Act 2:12 And they were all amazed, and were in doubt, saying one to another, What meaneth this? Act 2:13 Others mocking said, These men are full of new wine.

In response to the falling of the Holy Spirit, those present (not only the twelve apostles) began **to** speak with other tongues. These were languages that they were never taught, and they spoke these languages, speaking as the Spirit gave them utterance which was of the wonderful works of God.

The multitude from many nations gathered in Jerusalem because of the Feast of Pentecost. Many of these were the same people who gathered in Jerusalem at the last feast, Passover, when an angry mob demanded the execution of Jesus.

And when this sound occurred: A crowd quickly gathered, being attracted by this sound, which was either the sound of the rushing mighty wind or the sound of speaking in other tongues. When the crowd came, they heard the Christians speaking in their own foreign languages.

From this remarkable event, all were amazed and perplexed, some used it as a means of honest inquiry and asked, "Whatever could this mean?" Others used it as an excuse to dismiss the work of God and said, "They are full of new wine."

Look, are not all these who speak Galileans? People from Galilee (Galileans) were apparently known to be uncultured and poor speakers. This was all the more reason to be impressed with their ability to speak eloquently in other languages. "Galileans had difficulty pronouncing gutturals and had the habit of swallowing syllables when speaking; so they were looked down upon by the people of Jerusalem as being provincial." (Longenecker)

They all spoke in different tongues, yet there was a unity among the believers. "Ever since the early church fathers, commentators have seen the blessing of Pentecost as a deliberate and dramatic reversal of the curse of Babel." (Stott)

Gen 11:6 And the LORD said, Behold, the people is one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do. Gen 11:7 Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech. Gen 11:8 So the LORD scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth: and they left off to build the city. Gen 11:9 Therefore is the name of it called Babel; because the LORD did there confound the language of all the earth: and from thence did the LORD scatter them abroad upon the face of all the earth.

As the removal of communication scattered people upon the face of all the earth, so the coming of the Spirit united them. Babel wasn't reversed as the people remained scattered, but the message was the same to all of them. What I like here is that the command to spread the Gospel to the ends of the earth is being honoured by the Spirit showing that different languages will not be an obstacle to the mission.

What are we to make of the phenomenon of speaking in tongues? Speaking in tongues has been the focal point for significant controversy in the church. People still ask the same question these bystanders asked on the day of Pentecost.

There is no controversy that God, at least at one time, gave the church the gift of tongues. But much of the controversy centres on the question, "what is God's purpose for the gift of tongues?"

Many mistakenly interpret this incident in Acts chapter 2, assuming that the disciples used tongues to preach to the gathered crowd. But a careful look shows this idea is wrong. Notice what the people heard the disciples say: speaking... the wonderful works of God. The disciples declared the praises of God, thanking Him with all their might in unknown tongues. The gathered crowd merely overheard what the disciples exuberantly declared to God.

Was this speaking in tongues in Acts 2 the same gift of tongues described in 1 Corinthians 12 and 14? I would say we are dealing with two separate gifts. The 1

Corinthians gift must be regulated and restricted, while the Acts 2 gift can be used any time without regulation. Those who believe they are two separate gifts emphasize that the speech of Acts 2 was immediately recognized by foreign visitors to Jerusalem, while the speech of 1 Corinthians was unintelligible to those present except with a Divinely granted gift of interpretation.

The differences perhaps have more to do with the circumstances in which the gifts were exercised than with the gifts themselves.

In Jerusalem, the group spoken to was uniquely multi-national and multi-lingual; at least time (Pentecost), Jews of the dispersion from all over the world were in the city. Therefore, the likelihood that foreign ears would hear a tongue spoken in their language was much greater.

When we see the Christians beginning to spread out beyond the original homeland environment, they're following a pathway that had already been well trod before them by other Jews. By the middle of the first century, there are probably more Jews living outside of the homeland, than actually live back in Judah proper. This is what we call the Diaspora, that is, the dispersion of Jewish population throughout the Empire, and we know that there are major Jewish communities in most of the large cities of the Empire, all the way from the Persian Gulf on the east to Spain on the west.

It's interesting to note that early Christianity first spread in those areas where there was a Jewish presence. That is, it spreads in Egypt, it spreads in Syria, it spreads in Asia Minor, it spreads in Greece and Italy. These are precisely areas where we know there were Jewish communities, there were Jewish synagogues and there were Jews in number scattered throughout all these areas. Presumably the earliest Christian travellers and missionaries like Paul would begin their travels by obviously approaching their brethren, approaching their fellow Jews, and converting some of them to the new path or the new way of thinking, and perhaps using these communities as springboards from which to get access to the non-Jews in these very areas also. It's clear, then, that the Diaspora communities formed the Jewish network which early Christians as Jews were able to use for their own purposes.

In Corinth (though a rather cosmopolitan city itself), the gift of tongues was exercised in a local church, with members all sharing a common language (Greek). If one had the same diversity of foreigners visiting the Corinthian church when all were speaking in tongues, it is possible that many would have heard members of the Corinthian church speaking in our own tongues.

It should never be assumed that each person among the 120 who spoke in tongues on the Day of Pentecost spoke in a language immediately intelligible to human ears present that day. We read they all...began to speak with other tongues; therefore there were possibly some 120 plus individuals speaking in tongues. Since the nations spoken of in Acts 2:9-11 number only fifteen (with perhaps others present but not mentioned), it is likely that many (if not most) of the 120 spoke praises to God in a language that was not understood by someone immediately present. The text simply does not indicate that someone present could understand each person speaking in tongues.

They may have praised God in a language completely unknown, yet completely human. After all, what would the language of the Aztecs sound like to Roman ears? Or some may have spoke in a completely unique language given by God

and understood by Him and Him alone. After all, communication with God, not man, is one purpose of the gift of tongues.

1Co 14:2 For he that speaketh in an unknown tongue speaketh not unto men, but unto God: for no man understandeth him; howbeit in the spirit he speaketh mysteries.

Let us take a moment to look at the places these people were from.

Show slide



Act 2:8 And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born? Act 2:9 Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judaea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia, Act 2:10 Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes, Act 2:11 Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God.

They were all Gentile places and are described as Proselytes (which are those converted to Judaism).

Remember Noah's three sons, Shem, Ham and Japheth? Shem is noted in Luke's bloodline of Jesus. Their birth order is Japheth, Shem and Ham.

Luk 3:36 Which was the son of Cainan, which was the son of Arphaxad, which was the son of Sem, which was the son of Noe, which was the son of Lamech,

The descendents of Shem were to become the Israelites and here in Acts we finally see the full reuniting of the generations Noah.

The message is sent first to the bloodline of Jesus.

Peter's Sermon at Pentecost

Peter now begins his first sermon.

Act 2:14 But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said unto them, Ye men of Judaea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken to my words: Act 2:15 For these are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day.

Peter's sermon is an answer to one of Jesus' prayers. *Luk 22:32 But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.*

Peter stood and preached to the crowd as a representative of the whole group of apostles.

We should notice that the speaking in tongues stopped when Peter began to preach. The Holy Spirit now worked through Peter's preaching.

There was a remarkable change in Peter. He had courage and boldness that was a complete contrast to his denials of Jesus before being filled with the Holy Spirit.

This remarkable sermon had no preparation behind it, it was spontaneously given. Peter didn't wake up that morning knowing he would preach to thousands, and that thousands would embrace Jesus in response. Yet we could say that this was a well-prepared sermon; it was prepared by Peter's prior life with God and relationship with Jesus. It flowed spontaneously out of that life, and out of a mind that thought and believed deeply.

It is good to remember that what we have here recorded is a small portion of what Peter actually said. Acts 2:40 tells us, And with many other words he testified and exhorted them. Like almost all the sermons recorded in the Bible, what we have is a Holy Spirit inspired abridgment of a longer message.

So what did Peter say?

Act 2:16 But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; Act 2:17 And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams: Act 2:18 And on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy: Act 2:19 And I will shew wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke: Act 2:20 The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the Lord come: Act 2:21 And it shall come to pass, that

whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.

Quoting Joel chapter 2, Peter explains the strange events at Pentecost.

Joe 2:28 And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions: Joe 2:29 And also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit. Joe 2:30 And I will shew wonders in the heavens and in the earth, blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke. Joe 2:31 The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and the terrible day of the LORD come. Joe 2:32 And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the LORD shall be delivered: for in mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance, as the LORD hath said, and in the remnant whom the LORD shall call.

This introduces the first of three Old Testament passages Peter will quote, I love that he is well versed in this. If Peter needed to be well versed then we should use this as our example.

This quotation from Joel focuses on God's promise to pour out His Spirit on all flesh. What happened on the day of Pentecost was a near fulfilment of that promise, with the final fulfilment coming in the last days (which Peter had good reason to believe he was in).

Joel mostly prophesied about judgment that was coming to ancient Israel. Yet in the midst of the many warnings of judgment, God also gave several words of promise, promises of future blessings, like this one that announces an outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

Peter did not say of that Pentecostal gift, 'Now is fulfilled that which was spoken by the prophet Joel,' but, more guardedly, 'This is that which was spoken;' that is to say, Joel's words furnish the explanation of this first Pentecost, though this does not finish their fulfilment."There is more to come from this.

This was a glorious emphasis on Pentecost. Under the Old Covenant, certain people were filled with the Spirit at certain times for specific purposes. Now, under the New Covenant, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit is for all who call upon the name of the LORD, "even servants".

Whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved: Peter used this passage from Joel to an evangelistic purpose. This outpouring of the Holy Spirit meant that God offered salvation to whoever calls on the name of the Lord, whether they are Jew or Gentile.

Peter moves on to introduce the focus of the sermon: The resurrected Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth. How great to see the turnaround from denying to expounding.

Act 2:22 Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know: Act 2:23 Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by

wicked hands have crucified and slain: Act 2:24 Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it.

Many people would think it would be enough for Peter to stop after the quotation from Joel, considering all we have in it. Joel told us of:

- An outpouring of the Holy Spirit.
- Miraculous dreams, visions, and prophecy.
- Signs and wonders regarding the Day of the Lord.
- An invitation to call on the name of the Lord.

But it wasn't enough, because Peter had not yet spoken about the saving work of Jesus on our behalf. Everything until this point had been introduction, explaining the strange things they had just seen. Now Peter will bring the essential message.

It is worthwhile as we go through the book of Acts to look at the content of sermons and witnesses, these are I believe the recommendations and templates for us. There are many examples which follow Peter, including Paul, John, Philip and Barnabas, they all preach Jesus. We don't need to stress about what to share, there is only one thing!

This much Peter had already said, let this be known to you, and heed my words (Acts 2:14). Peter wanted people to pay attention, and he spoke as if he had something important to say, something some teachers fail to do.

Peter referred to what these people already knew about Jesus. They already knew of His life and miraculous works. Often in speaking to people about Jesus, we should start with what they already know about Him.

Peter knew that Jesus' death was in the plan of God. At the same time, those who rejected Him and called for His execution were responsible for the actions of their lawless hands.

Peter did not flinch at saying, "You crucified this man who God sent." His first concern was not to please his audience, but to tell them the truth. The Spirit-filled Peter was a different man to the Peter who, a few months before this, denied even knowing Jesus.

Having loosed the pains of death. In the phrase pains of death, the word pains is actually the word for "birth pains." In this sense, the tomb was a womb for Jesus. This reminds me of two womb related verses.

Job 1:21 And said, Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.

Ecc 5:15 As he came forth of his mother's womb, naked shall he return to go as he came, and shall take nothing of his labour, which he may carry away in his hand.

It was not possible that the chosen one of God should remain in the grip of death, no more than a pregnant woman can hold her child in her body.'

The Lord Said Unto My Lord

Act 2:25 For David speaketh concerning him, I foresaw the Lord always before my face, for he is on my right hand, that I should not be moved: Act 2:26 Therefore did my heart rejoice, and my tongue was glad; moreover also my flesh shall rest in hope: Act 2:27 Because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Act 2:28 Thou hast made known to me the ways of life; thou shalt make me full of joy with thy countenance. Act 2:29 Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day. Act 2:30 Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne; Act 2:31 He seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption. Act 2:32 This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses. Act 2:33 Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear.

Peter seems to have an affinity with and love of the Psalms. He used the book in his justification for replacing Judas and now it is the foundation for his first sermon.

Quoting Psalm 16 Peter explains the resurrected Jesus.

Psa 16:8 I have set the LORD always before me: because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved. Psa 16:9 Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth: my flesh also shall rest in hope. Psa 16:10 For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Psa 16:11 Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.

For David says concerning Him: Peter recognized that though this Psalm spoke of David, it spoke of someone greater than David, the Messiah, Jesus the Christ. Jesus may have taught Peter this when He instructed the disciples in the Scriptures.

Luk 24:44 And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me. Luk

24:45 Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures,

Jesus bore the full wrath of God on the cross, *as if He were a guilty sinner, guilty of all our sin.* Yet, that work was an act of holy, giving love for us, so that Jesus Himself did not become a sinner, even though He bore the full guilt of our sin. *2Co 5:21 For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.*

This is the gospel message; that Jesus took our punishment for sin on the cross and remained a perfect Saviour through the whole ordeal, proved by His resurrection. Apart from the resurrection, we would have no proof that Jesus successfully, perfectly, paid for our sins.

Because Jesus bore our sin without becoming a sinner, He remained the Holy One, even in His death. Since it is incomprehensible that God's Holy One should be bound by death, the resurrection was absolutely inevitable.

Jesus was rewarded for His work on the cross, as prophetically described in Psalms. *Psa 16:11 Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.*

Peter points out that this Psalm cannot be speaking of its human author David, as he is dead and remains buried. The Psalm must speak prophetically of the Messiah, Jesus.

This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses: Jesus of Nazareth, the man they all knew was the one who fulfilled this prophetic Psalm. How did Peter know this? He saw the resurrected Jesus! The basic evidence of the resurrection was simply the report of reliable eyewitnesses: Of which we are all witnesses.

He poured out this which you now see and hear: Peter affirms that what the crowd saw was the work of the risen and ascended Jesus, who has sent His Holy Spirit upon His church.

Act 2:34 For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, Act 2:35 Until I make thy foes thy footstool. Act 2:36 Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.

Quoting Psalm 110, Peter explains the Divine Messiah. This begins the third Old Testament passage Peter used in his sermon,

*Psa 110:1 **A Psalm of David.** The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool.*

This verse of the Old Testament is quoted in the New Testament more than any other single verse is either quoted or referred to. In this Psalm, David understood and proclaimed the deity of the Messiah.

King David by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit recorded that Yahweh, Israel's covenant God spoke to David's Lord as God. Peter used this to show that the Messiah, who is the focus of Psalm 110, is in fact Divine, He is God.

The sermon concludes with a summary. Simply, all Israel should know that even though they crucified Jesus, God has declared Him both Lord and Christ.

Jesus Himself quoted this Psalm.

Mat 22:41 While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, Mat 22:42 Saying, What think ye of Christ? whose son is he? They say unto him, The Son of David. Mat 22:43 He saith unto them, How then doth David in spirit call him Lord, saying, Mat 22:44 The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool? Mat 22:45 If David then call him Lord, how is he his son?

Fathers do not call their son's Lord, but sons do call their fathers Lord.

Other references include:

1Co 15:24 Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. 1Co 15:25 For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet.

Heb 1:10 And, Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of thine hands: Heb 1:11 They shall perish; but thou remainest; and they all shall wax old as doth a garment; Heb 1:12 And as a vesture shalt thou fold them up, and they shall be changed: but thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail. Heb 1:13 But to which of the angels said he at any time, Sit on my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool?

Heb 10:12 But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God; Heb 10:13 From henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool. Heb 10:14 For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.

It is as if Peter said, "You were all wrong about Jesus. You crucified Him as if He were a criminal, but by the resurrection, God proved that He is Lord and Messiah."

Peter's ministry is effective, the people listen and are convicted, wanting to know more.

Act 2:37 Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?

This was obviously a significant work of the Holy Spirit. The great crowd listening to Peter was deeply moved by Peter's bold proclamation of the truth. They asked Peter how they should respond.

It is wrong to think that Peter offered no kind of invitation or challenge for his listeners to respond. Luke says next, And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation." Peter clearly did exhort them to respond, and invited his listeners to "repent." The multitude responded with remarkable initiative.

The response of the crowd also helps us to put the events of that Day of Pentecost into perspective. The exercise of the gift of tongues produced nothing in the listeners except for astonishment and mocking. It wasn't until the gospel was preached that conviction from the Holy Spirit came. This was the work God really wanted to accomplish.

Pricked in their hearts is a good way of describing the conviction of the Holy Spirit. They now knew that they were responsible for the death of Jesus (as each of us is), and that they had to do something in response to this.

Peter had some previous experience with cutting. When Jesus was arrested, Peter cut off the right ear of one of the men who came to arrest Jesus. All this was an embarrassing mess that Jesus had to clean up. That showed Peter in the flesh, doing the best he could with a literal sword of human power.

When the resurrected Jesus changed Peter's life and when the power of the Holy Spirit had come upon him, he did some much more effective cutting; cutting hearts, opening them to Jesus. This is what Peter could do in the power of the Spirit, doing God's best with the sword of the Spirit, God's Word.

When God is working on someone's heart, they want to come to Him; they will act to come to God.

Act 2:38 Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. Act 2:39 For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call. Act 2:40 And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation.

Notice that in the New Testament baptism is still required.

What Shall We Do?

Peter invites the multitude to come to Jesus.

When Peter exhorted them whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved (Acts 2:21), there is little doubt who the Lord is that he spoke of, it was Jesus.

Peter must have been amazed to see what God had done in this situation. Instead of people wanting to crucify Jesus, thousands of people wanted to trust in Jesus as Lord and Messiah.

Responding to the question, "What shall we do?" Peter gave them something to *do*. This means that we must *do* something to be saved, we must *do* something to follow Jesus; it doesn't just "happen."

The first thing Peter told them to *do* is repent. To repent means to change one's mind or direction. They had thought a certain way about Jesus before, considering Him worthy of crucifixion. Now they must turn their thinking around, embracing Jesus as Lord.

When John the Baptist preached he said, "*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!*" (Matthew 3:2). When Jesus began to preach He said, "*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand*" (Matthew 4:17). Now when Peter began to preach, he started with repent.

In a sense, repent is a word of great hope. It says, "You don't have to continue the way you've been going, you can turn to God."

"The old-fashioned grace of repentance is not to be dispensed with; there must be sorrow for sin; there must be 'a broken and a contrite heart.' This, God will not despise; but a 'conversion' which does not produce this result, God will not accept as genuine." (Spurgeon)

Be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ: This was the second thing Peter said they must do. For them to be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ was an expression of their belief and complete trust in Him.

The promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off: As they repented and demonstrated faith and obedience by baptism, Peter also specifically promised that the promise of the Holy Spirit would be given to those who believe in all succeeding generations.

The gift of the Holy Ghost does not mean in this place the power of speaking with tongues. For the promise of this was not given to all that were afar off in distant ages and nations. But rather the constant fruits of faith, even righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. Whomsoever the Lord our God shall call - (Whether they are Jews or Gentiles) by his word and by his Spirit: and who are not disobedient to the heavenly calling. (John Wesley)

They saw the glorious work of the Holy Spirit among the disciples, and Peter told them that it was something that these people could take part in; they didn't only have to be observers. And since the promise is for all who are afar off, it includes all people up to the present time. This is an offer for all time.

"That is to say, that great covenant promise, 'Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved,' is meant for you, is meant for your children, is meant for Hottentots, is meant for Hindoos, is meant for Greenlanders, is meant for everybody to whom the Lord's call is addressed." (Spurgeon)

And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, Peter's sermon didn't end there. He continued to urge the crowd to come to Jesus in repentant surrender.

Any generation that is responsible for putting Jesus to death is a perverse generation. But since *every* generation is responsible for Jesus' death, every generation needs salvation.

Act 2:41 Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.

Let's look at the response to Peter's sermon.

About three thousand souls were added to them: This day of Pentecost saw an amazing harvest of souls.

Think of how this touched lives beyond that one day. Many of the 3,000 were undoubtedly pilgrims who came to Jerusalem for the feast of Pentecost. They expected something special from God, but not anything like this. Many in this crowd went back home, travelling far from Jerusalem, taking the good news of Jesus Christ with them.

Those who believed on Jesus that day did so gladly.

We must note the significance of the Old Testament early on in Acts and see how much of it is the strength of the New Testament. It goes beyond the fulfilment of prophecy to the reminder that it has not gone away at all.

So far we have seen Joel quoted and fulfilled in the promise of the Baptism of the Spirit, we have been thrown back to the Exodus with the Clouds and seen much of the Psalms (chapters 41, 69, 109) quoted. We have been reminded of the Feast of Weeks, the Jubilee and the Kinsman Redeemer.

We have only looked at two chapters of Acts, it will be interesting to monitor this phenomenon as we proceed. This shows Old Testament apologetics used in the New Testament.

How could you baptise 3,000 people? There were huge resources of water available on the temple mount, and pools and reservoirs nearby, so it was not difficult to find a place where the baptisms could take place.

The Fellowship of the Believers

So what happened next?

Act 2:42 And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.

We get a tantalising glimpse into the lives of these first believers.

This is the foundation of their Christian life and there are four key areas. These four areas are as applicable to us now as they were to our earlier brethren.

On the day of Pentecost the sound of the rushing wind, the tongues of fire, and the conversion of 3,000 were all remarkable events. But the things described in Acts 2:42 were the abiding legacy of God's work.

They continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine. They relied on the apostles to communicate to them who Jesus was and what He had done. They trusted in Jesus and now they wanted to know more.

Continued steadfastly uses a Greek verb communicating a steadfast and single-minded fidelity to a certain course of action. There was to be no departure from the apostles' doctrine, because it was the truth of God.

These were persevering believers; they were constant hearers, they continually attended on the ministry of the apostles, and held fast the words they had received from them; and stood fast in the faith of the Gospel, notwithstanding all the reproach cast upon it, and the afflictions they endured for it:

Thankfully, God allows us to sit under this exact same apostles' doctrine, the New Testament record and the Old Testament links.

They continued steadfastly in...fellowship: The ancient Greek word *koinonia* (translated here as fellowship) has the idea of association, communion, fellowship, and participation; it means to share in something.

Fellowship took the form of spiritual conversation with them, in private, and in communion with them at the Lord's Table in public.

The Christian life is meant to be full of fellowship, of sharing one with another, this is what unity is all about.

We should share the same Lord Jesus, love for God and a desire to worship Him. The same struggles, victories and joy of communicating the gospel.

They continued steadfastly...in the breaking of bread. Even living so close to the time when Jesus was crucified, they still never wanted to forget what He did on

the cross. How much more important is it for us to never forget? They show obedience in observing this newly created sacrament.

They continued steadfastly in prayers. Whenever God's work is done, God's people gather for prayer and worship.

In the Greek the definite article occurs before the word 'prayer.' The text actually says, 'to the prayers.' They devoted themselves 'to the breaking of bread and to the prayers.' This seems to reference something formal, to worship in which the people got together and praised God.

Everything else we read about the power and glory of the early church flows from this foundation of the word, fellowship, remembrance of Jesus' work on the cross, and prayer.

It is presented as a model church, but this does not mean that it was perfect.

Act 2:43 And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles.

This was evidence of the power of God. One of the greatest, most powerful works God can do is to change the human heart towards a reverent honour of the Lord. This was evidence of the power of God. Where God is at work, lives will be touched in miraculous ways.

Act 2:44 And all that believed were together, and had all things common; Act 2:45 And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need.

With the influx of more than 3,000 believers, most of whom stayed in Jerusalem and didn't have jobs, the family of Christians had to share if they were to survive.

We shouldn't regard this as an early experiment in communism because it was voluntary, temporary, and flawed to the extent that the church in Jerusalem was in continual need of financial support from other churches. Also, we don't have any evidence that this continued very long, quite the opposite in fact considering the fall of Jerusalem.

What will have proved a welcome result of this was that when Jerusalem was destroyed a little later, they had already liquefied their assets and therefore made little financial loss and been immediately able to mobilise.

The Jews had a tremendous custom of hospitality during any major feast like Pentecost. Visitors were received into private homes, and no one could charge for giving a bed or a room to a visitor or for supplying their basic needs. The Christians took this tremendous feast-time hospitality and made it an everyday thing.

The power of God is evident here because Jesus became much more important to them than their possessions.

Act 2:46 And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, Act 2:47 Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.

The Christian family lived together and grew.

The church is meant to worship God and learn His word together. Yet it is meant to do more; God wants us to share our *lives* with one another. Their Christian experience was daily, joyful and simple, a good example for us to follow.

The Lord added daily, this is God's prescription for growth. If we take care to follow the example of Acts, God will take care of growing the congregation Himself. The Lord decides who should and shouldn't be included, not us.

They are still in the Temple, but also breaking bread from house to house, this seems odd when the people would in future meet in houses and drop all "formal" buildings for worship and fellowship. The Temple would be destroyed by the Romans in 70 CE, but the angel had said the temple was to be a place of preaching and also was probably the biggest meeting place in Jerusalem.

My thoughts on this are many, firstly that there were so many of them the Temple was a good place to hold them. Peter may actually have preached his sermon there. We know that Peter and others still went to the Temple, perhaps it was ingrained in them as a focus point and they may have considered the Temple their heritage. How would it have looked if they had abandoned it? Perhaps people would have thought that they had abandoned their Jewish heritage.

Jesus Himself taught in the Temple frequently and so His example may have been followed.

Joh 18:19 The high priest then asked Jesus of his disciples, and of his doctrine. Joh 18:20 Jesus answered him, I spake openly to the world; I ever taught in the synagogue, and in the temple, whither the Jews always resort; and in secret have I said nothing.

As Jesus says the Temple is where the Jews always go, so the disciples are in the right place to begin their outreach to Jerusalem.

These are early days and the people of God still have a lot to learn about the new form of worship. Remember the Jews among them had some major changes to a lifetime of rituals and sacrifices that must have been quite intimidating for them.

We have now studied Peter's sermon which is an explanation of what happened at Pentecost and a call to repent and be Baptised and this prompted me to look at different sermons in the Bible. As we go through the book of Acts we will be able to see many more of them. I intend to summarise and collate these towards the end as I believe it provides a solid blueprint for us today in our witness.

The sermons in the book of Acts give us a window into the preaching ministries of Peter, Stephen, Philip, James, and Paul, along with the immediate impact those sermons had.

Spreading the Message to Jerusalem

The Lamé Beggar Healed

Act 3:1 Now Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour. Act 3:2 And a certain man lame from his mother's womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms of them that entered into the temple; Act 3:3 Who seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple asked an alms. Act 3:4 And Peter, fastening his eyes upon him with John, said, Look on us. Act 3:5 And he gave heed unto them, expecting to receive something of them. Act 3:6 Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk. Act 3:7 And he took him by the right hand, and lifted him up: and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength. Act 3:8 And he leaping up stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God. Act 3:9 And all the people saw him walking and praising God: Act 3:10 And they knew that it was he which sat for alms at the Beautiful gate of the temple: and they were filled with wonder and amazement at that which had happened unto him. .

This is not the first time Peter and John are shown together, they and John's brother James had a very close and privileged relationship with Jesus.

Luk 22:7 Then came the day of unleavened bread, when the passover must be killed. Luk 22:8 And he sent Peter and John, saying, Go and prepare us the passover, that we may eat.

Joh 20:1 The first day of the week cometh Mary Magdalene early, when it was yet dark, unto the sepulchre, and seeth the stone taken away from the sepulchre. Joh 20:2 Then she runneth, and cometh to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple, whom Jesus loved, and saith unto them, They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulchre, and we know not where they have laid him. Joh 20:3 Peter therefore went forth, and that other disciple, and came to the sepulchre. Joh 20:4 So they ran both together: and the other disciple did outrun Peter, and came first to the sepulchre.

Peter and John seem to have had a peculiar intimacy after Christ's resurrection more than before. The reason of which might be this, that John, a disciple made up of love, was more compassionate to Peter upon his fall and repentance, and

more tender of him in his bitter weeping for his sin, than any other of the apostles were, and more solicitous to restore him in the spirit of meekness, which made him very dear to Peter ever after; and it was good evidence of Peter's acceptance with God, upon his repentance, that Christ's favourite was made his bosom friend.

Perhaps the Lord was being kind to John and aligning him with Peter to soften the blow of his brother's death.

Miracles acted as a focus and confirmation for the word of God as did the signs.

Mar 16:20 And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following. Amen.

The Apostles deliberately go to the temple at the hour of prayer (the ninth) which appears to have been customary and being also the hour of our Lords death.

Luk 23:44 And it was about the sixth hour, and there was a darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour. Luk 23:45 And the sun was darkened, and the veil of the temple was rent in the midst. Luk 23:46 And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus, he gave up the ghost.

Apparently Peter and John saw no problem in continuing their Jewish custom of prayer at certain hours of the day. Morgan points out that Peter and John were not going to the temple at the hour of sacrifice, but at the hour of prayer that followed the afternoon sacrifice. They realised that the sacrificial system was fulfilled in the perfect sacrifice Jesus offered on the cross.

Calvin saw a missionary intent in what Peter and John did: "Furthermore, if any man ask, whether the apostles went up into the temple that they might pray according to the rite of the law, I do not think that that is a thing so likely to be true, as they might have better opportunity to spread abroad the gospel."

What do we have? They gave what they had.

Act 3:6 Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk.

Remember what Jesus said when the twelve were sent out?

Mat 10:6 But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Mat 10:7 And as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand. Mat 10:8 Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give. Mat 10:9 Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass in your purses,

The Ethiopic version reads, "we have none"; and so it reads the next clause in the first person plural that is, they had no money either of gold or silver coin; they had none about them, nor any of their own perhaps anywhere; none but what was brought to them, and put into their hands as a common stock for the whole church, or the poor of it: nor indeed might any money be carried in a purse into the temple.

The Apostles were at the temple, not to glorify the worship of old Israel, but to declare freedom to the slaves of the old system. This is done by this singular sign of healing.

This is the first miracle of the New Testament, if we separate out the Pentecost.

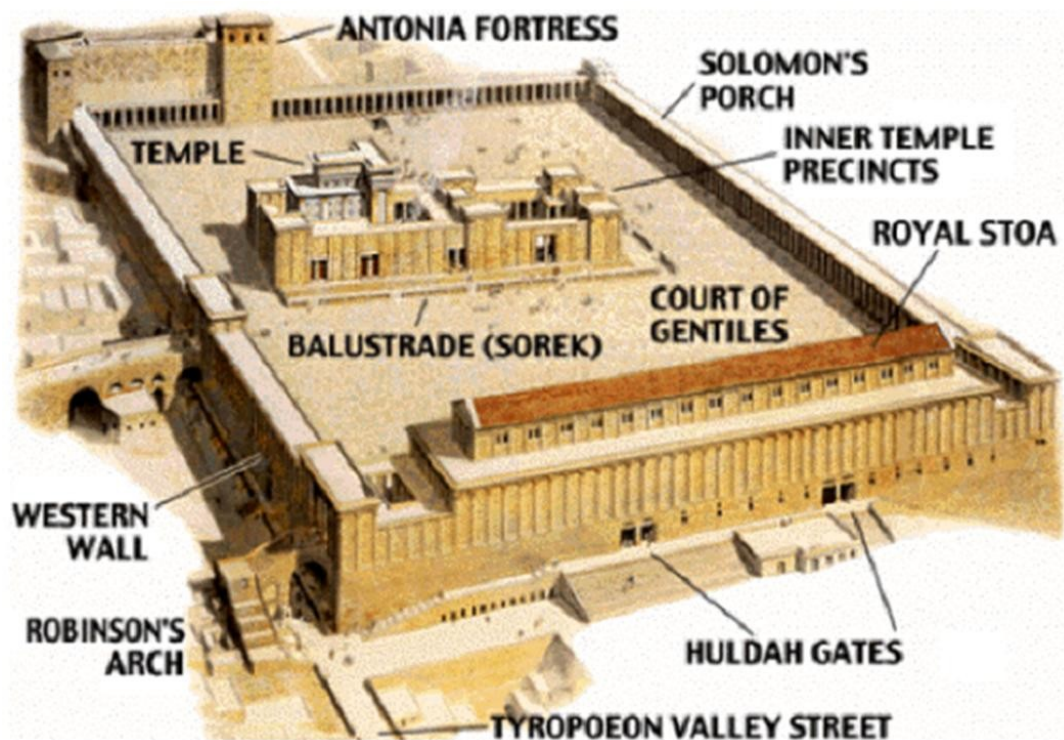
Peter Speaks in Solomon's Portico

Act 3:11 And as the lame man which was healed held Peter and John, all the people ran together unto them in the porch that is called Solomon's, greatly wondering. Act 3:12 And when Peter saw it, he answered unto the people, Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this? or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk? Act 3:13 The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified his Son Jesus; whom ye delivered up, and denied him in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let him go. Act 3:14 But ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you; Act 3:15 And killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses. Act 3:16 And his name through faith in his name hath made this man strong, whom ye see and know: yea, the faith which is by him hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all. Act 3:17 And now, brethren, I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers. Act 3:18 But those things, which God before had shewed by the mouth of all his prophets, that Christ should suffer, he hath so fulfilled. Act 3:19 Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord; Act 3:20 And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: Act 3:21 Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began. Act 3:22 For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you. Act 3:23 And it shall come to pass, that every soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people. Act 3:24 Yea, and all the prophets from Samuel and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days. Act 3:25 Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed. Act 3:26 Unto you first God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities.

Let's go to Solomon's porch - show slide

Solomon's Porch, Portico or Colonnade (στοά του Σολομωντος) was a colonnade or cloister, located on the eastern side of the Temple's Outer Court (Women's Court) in Jerusalem, named after Solomon, King of Israel, and not to be confused with the Royal Stoa, which was on the southern side of Herod's Temple.

The gate of the temple which is called Beautiful: The Jewish historian Josephus described this gate on the temple mount; made of fine Corinthian brass, seventy-five feet high with huge double doors, so beautiful that it "greatly excelled those that were only covered over with silver and gold." (Cited in Stott)



We read of Jesus walking in Solomon's Porch during the winter.

Joh 10:22 And it was at Jerusalem the feast of the dedication, and it was winter. Joh 10:23 And Jesus walked in the temple in Solomon's porch. Joh 10:24 Then came the Jews round about him, and said unto him, How long dost thou make us to doubt? If thou be the Christ, tell us plainly.

This is to become a regular haunt.

Act 5:12 And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people; (and they were all with one accord in Solomon's porch. Act 5:13 And of the rest durst no man join himself to them: but the people magnified them. Act 5:14 And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women.)

Power and Piety.

Act 3:12 And when Peter saw it, he answered unto the people, Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this? or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk?

A man may perform God's deeds yet be ungodly (Numbers chapter 23) as in the case of Balaam, The gift was clearly God's and the Christians were only too ready to acknowledge it and to explain the cause and origins of the healing as the risen Christ.

When Peter saw it, he responded to the people: Peter wisely took advantage of the gathering crowd. Yet he knew that the phenomenon of the miraculous in itself brought no one to Jesus, it merely aroused interest. Though they were greatly amazed, they weren't saved yet.

This might have been a good time for a testimony service, for the healed man certainly had a great experience. Yet Peter knew that what the crowd needed to hear, even more than the healed man's experience, was the gospel of Jesus Christ, and a call to repent and believe. The healed man didn't know enough yet to share that, so Peter did the talking.

Peter knew that saving faith did not come by seeing or hearing about miracles, rather *faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God* (Romans 10:17).

Again Peter's sermon is based on the fact that The Jewish People should repent for crucifying the Messiah. He does not pull any punches.

See his reference to Moses, if you did not hear him. Jesus says the same thing. *Joh 5:46 For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me.*

The greatness of Peter's sermon is that it was all about Jesus. The focus on the sermon was not on Peter nor on anything he did, but all about Jesus.

The first thing Peter said about Jesus in this sermon drew attention to the idea that Jesus was spoken of in the Hebrew Scriptures (as in Isaiah 42 and 52:13-53:12). "The concept of the 'servant of the Lord' was well-known in Israel because of Isaiah 53 and other texts." (Boice)

For Moses truly said to the fathers: The Jewish people of Peter's day were aware of this prophecy of Moses, but some thought that the Prophet would be someone different than the Messiah.

Deu 18:15 The LORD thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken;

Deu 18:18 I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him. Deu 18:19 And it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken unto my words which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him.

Peter makes it clear that they are one and the same.

Act 3:17 And now, brethren, I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers. Act 3:18 But those things, which God before had shewed by the mouth of all his prophets, that Christ should suffer, he hath so fulfilled. Act 3:19 Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord; Act 3:20 And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you:

This is the same message as before. *Act 2:38 Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.*

Peter and John Before the Council

Act 4:1 And as they spake unto the people, the priests, and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees, came upon them, Act 4:2 Being grieved that they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead. Act 4:3 And they laid hands on them, and put them in hold unto the next day: for it was now eventide. Act 4:4 Howbeit many of them which heard the word believed; and the number of the men was about five thousand. Act 4:5 And it came to pass on the morrow, that their rulers, and elders, and scribes, Act 4:6 And Annas the high priest, and Caiaphas, and John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the kindred of the high priest, were gathered together at Jerusalem. Act 4:7 And when they had set them in the midst, they asked, By what power, or by what name, have ye done this? Act 4:8 Then Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost, said unto them, Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel, Act 4:9 If we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole; Act 4:10 Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole. Act 4:11 This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Act 4:12 Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved. Act 4:13 Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus. Act 4:14 And beholding the man which was healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it. Act 4:15 But when they had commanded them to go aside out of the council, they conferred among themselves, Act 4:16 Saying, What shall we do to these men? for that indeed a notable miracle hath been done by them is manifest to all them that dwell in Jerusalem; and we cannot deny it. Act 4:17 But that it spread no further among the people, let us straitly threaten them, that they speak henceforth to no man in this name. Act 4:18 And they called them, and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus. Act 4:19 But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. Act 4:20 For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard. Act 4:21 So when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding nothing how they might punish them, because of the people: for all men glorified God for that which was done. Act 4:22 For the man was above forty years old, on whom this miracle of healing was shewed.

Who is the “captain of the Temple”? This refers to the police force of the temple precincts. The captain together with the priests and the Sadducees, all came together to arrest Peter and John. The Sadducees would be greatly disturbed that Peter and John taught the people and preached in Jesus the resurrection from the dead; they did not believe in the afterlife or the resurrection at all.

We see that they were arrested on suspicion of teaching dangerous ideas, such as that Jesus was raised from the dead, and for healing a man who had been crippled his entire life.

Boice notes that Acts 4:1-6 lists no less than 11 different groups or individuals opposing these followers of Jesus.

- Groups: Priests and the Sadducees (Acts 4:1); Rulers, elders, scribes (Acts 4:5); and others from the family of the high priest (Acts 4:6).
- Individuals: The captain of the temple (Acts 4:1); Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John, and Alexander (Acts 4:6).

Act 4:6 Annas the high priest was there, with Caiaphas, John, Alexander, and as many as were relatives of the high priest.

This is the same Caiaphas that Jesus was tried before, he is now persecuting the Christians. He is also seemingly from a nepotistic family, his father in law and other relatives are part of the Sanhedrin.

Joh 18:12 Then the band and the captain and officers of the Jews took Jesus, and bound him, Joh 18:13 And led him away to Annas first; for he was father in law to Caiaphas, which was the high priest that same year. Joh 18:14 Now Caiaphas was he, which gave counsel to the Jews, that it was expedient that one man should die for the people.

Act 4:8 Then Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost, said unto them, Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel,

Peter was instantly filled with the Spirit again, evident by his supernatural boldness and ability to speak the gospel directly to the heart of the matter.

The filling of the Holy Spirit Peter experienced in Acts 2:4 (along with other disciples) was not a one-time event. It was something God wanted to continue doing in their lives.

Act 4:13 Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and had perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled. They recognized that they had been with Jesus.

They were uneducated and untrained men: In a sense, we should probably disagree with the opinion of the Jewish leaders judging Peter and John. Certainly they were uneducated in one sense, they like Jesus, had no formal rabbinic education according to the customs and standards of that time. Yet they *were* educated in two more important ways: they knew the Scriptures, and they had been with Jesus.

The greater importance of these two things, more important than formal education, has been proven in the lives of God's servants again and again.

It is helpful to remember that God has also used many who were greatly educated. Moses, Daniel, and Paul are all Biblical examples. Augustine and Martin Luther are just a few historical examples. It's just as wrong to think that a lack of formal education disqualifies someone for effective service as it is to think that it automatically qualifies someone for effective service.

This is the 'stone which was rejected by you builders': The quotation from Psalms was appropriate. Jesus was rejected by men, by those leaders, but was exalted by His Father.

Psa 118:22 The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner. Psa 118:23 This is the LORD'S doing; it is marvellous in our eyes.

One difference here is that Peter changes the builders to you builders. This is personal!

Peter didn't merely proclaim Jesus as *a way* of salvation, but as the only way of salvation. The idea that there is no salvation in any other, and that there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved is hard to accept for many, but is plainly stated.

Jesus' authority is contrasted with the Temple authorities.

The focus of this section shifts from the temple complex itself to the temple authorities. Their concern is initially expressed with reference to the apostles' proclamation of Jesus' resurrection as that which anticipates the final resurrection from the dead. Their preaching, notes Luke, is having such an effect that despite the authorities' attempt to put a stop to it by arresting Peter and John, even so (note "But," 4:4), many are responding and becoming believers. Their question "By what power or by what name did you do this?" showed that what was at stake here was the question of authority, especially over the people associated with God, the people of Israel, since the rulers of Israel exercise their authority here in the temple, the heart of Israel's faith during the old era. The reference to the "power or name" in their question not only focuses the issue as one of authority, but it also recalls earlier references to the significance of "the name of Jesus" and will become the defining issue in Peter's reply.

When Luke says that Peter is "filled with the Holy Spirit", he indicates that the Holy Spirit empowered Peter to point to Jesus (as Jesus promised, 1:8). Peter addresses first the "Rulers of the people and elders" (4:8) but broadens his reply to show that what he is saying applies to "all the people of Israel" (4:10; cf. 1:6; 2:36).

Peter addresses the ruler's question by pointing to "the name of Jesus," the Messiah, as the means by which "this man is standing before you well" (4:10). Although they had Jesus crucified, God had raised Him from the dead; although they had rejected Him like a rejected stone for the building of the temple, He had become the cornerstone, the one who determines the shape of God's saving purposes (citing Ps 118:22 just as Jesus had done; cf. Luke 20:17). Indeed, Jesus is the exclusive source of ultimate salvation, no one else, no other name anywhere ("under heaven") is able to save. Thus, although these rulers thought they had authority over the temple and the people of Israel, Jesus has exclusive authority everywhere. Salvation can only be found in His name, and this healing is a sign that points to His exclusive and universal sufficiency.

The final verses describing this encounter between Peter and John and the temple authorities highlight the powerlessness of these rulers even more. They couldn't deny that the healing had occurred. Because all the people knew this,

the authorities couldn't punish Peter and John either. In the end their demand that Peter and John should no longer "speak or teach in the name of Jesus" is rejected by the apostles as disobedience to God (4:19-20). In opposing the apostles' proclamation of the risen Lord Jesus, these temple authorities oppose God.

Bold and Free.

Act 4:23 And being let go, they went to their own company, and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them. Act 4:24 And when they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said, Lord, thou art God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is: Act 4:25 Who by the mouth of thy servant David hast said, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things? Act 4:26 The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ. Act 4:27 For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, Act 4:28 For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done. Act 4:29 And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word, Act 4:30 By stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus. Act 4:31 And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness.

After reporting back to their brethren we see the new movement in action, the first thing they do is pray and with one accord - united.

Act 4:25 who by the mouth of your servant, David, said, 'Why do the nations rage, and the peoples plot a vain thing? Act 4:26 The kings of the earth take a stand, and the rulers take council together, against the Lord, and against his Christ.'

Another quote from David!

We don't know specifically who said these words, but whoever did spoke for all the disciples (remember they prayed with one accord). They recognized that these words of the Old Testament from Psalm 2 were really the words of God. God had spoken by the mouth of His servant David.

Until I began this study I hadn't realised how much of the Psalms spoke of Jesus and how much prophecy there is in the Psalms.

Psa 2:1 Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? Psa 2:2 The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against his anointed, saying, Psa 2:3 Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us.

The earliest Christians knew and accepted the Holy Scriptures and could see Jesus going back to the beginning of it.

Act 4:31 When they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were gathered together. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness.

Is this a top up of the Holy Spirit or another instance? Is the Holy Spirit time based and does it fade through humanity? It does not seem to be a one off filling whereby the cup stays full regardless. It is almost like our telomeres wearing away as we age.

We know that these powers can “move”, Jesus said it.

Luk 8:45 And Jesus said, Who touched me? When all denied, Peter and they that were with him said, Master, the multitude throng thee and press thee, and sayest thou, Who touched me? Luk 8:46 And Jesus said, Somebody hath touched me: for I perceive that virtue is gone out of me.

Jesus had an infinite, renewable power, but this was not the case with normal humans.

The place where they were assembled together was shaken. They were given an earthquake as a unique symbol of God’s pleasure. We don’t know the extent of the shaking, it may have been confined to the house itself.

The presence of the Holy Spirit was so wonderfully manifested that even dead walls felt the power of the Spirit of life, matter responded to spirit. (Pierson) Those walls didn’t change, nor did that become a special holy place where the Spirit of God always dwelt. In a similar way, a person can be shaken by the Holy Spirit without being transformed or indwelt by the Spirit of God.

They were all filled with the Holy Spirit. They were filled with the Holy Spirit, again. The experience on Pentecost was not a one-time experience. For Peter, this counts as the third time he is specifically said to be filled with the Holy Spirit so far.

Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit in John, when he was among the disciples.

Joh 20:21 Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you. Joh 20:22 And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost:

Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit in Acts when he was among the disciples who were “all filled with the Holy Spirit.

Act 2:4 And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

The idea that we are “Spirit filled” only at an experience known as the “Baptism of the Holy Spirit” is wrong, though there may be a wonderful and first yielding to the Spirit’s power. We must be continually filled with the Holy Spirit, and make our “immersion” in Him a constant experience.

The True People of God.

There is a shift in focus here as Peter and John are released by the rulers and go to “their friends” (“their own people,”). The immediate response of the believers is to raise their voices together to God. Thus, the contrast highlights a shift from those who claim to be the rulers over God’s people who are in fact opposed to God’s purposes, and the true people of God, those who depend upon God in prayer because they belong to Him (and one another) through trust in Him and His anointed one, Jesus.

Their prayer immediately places the preceding opposition in the context of God’s sovereignty. He is the one who rules over all because He is the creator of everything. He is also the one who has spoken beforehand about those who would oppose Jesus. The believers cite Psalm 2 and then make the connections to those who opposed Jesus in 4:27 (with Herod and Pilate replacing the references to kings and rulers in the Psalm).

Because of the believer’s association with Jesus (cf. 4:13), however, what is said about those who opposed Jesus applies also to those who oppose His people as we will see later with Saul/Paul (cf. 9:4–5). So, after identifying the opposition as those who “gathered together against” Jesus (their human responsibility), in the outworking of God’s predetermined purposes (God’s sovereignty; cf. 2:23), they associate this opposition against Jesus with the opposition from those who “gathered together” against them (cf. 4:5).

Their overarching concern, however, is that the Lord would grant boldness to the apostles to enable them to continue to proclaim his word in the face of opposition and that the Lord would continue to authenticate them as Jesus’ messengers with signs such as the healing in the temple that would point to Jesus’ sufficiency.

Immediate confirmation of God’s presence was given and like Peter, they were all enabled by the Spirit to proclaim “the word of God with boldness”.

Remember these words that Jesus said to Peter?

Mat 16:18 And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

We can see this prophecy being fulfilled.

Everything in Common.

They Had Everything in Common.

Act 4:32 And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one

soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common. Act 4:33 And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all. Act 4:34 Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, Act 4:35 And laid them down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need. Act 4:36 And Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation,) a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus, Act 4:37 Having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet.

You've heard this sentiment before!

Act 2:44 All who believed were together, and had all things in common.

Sir 18:1 He that lives forever created all things in common.

The Greek here does not mean that everyone sold their property at once. Rather, from time to time this was done as the Lord brought needs to their attention." (Horton)

There was also probably immediate reason for this significant sharing of all things in common. Since Pentecost there were a large number of those who believed and many of them were from distant lands. Without permanent homes and jobs in Jerusalem and Judea, those who stayed in Jerusalem to learn more about being followers of Jesus needed special support from the Christian community.

We get to meet the wonderful Barnabas, a Levite from Cyprus. Note the information we are told about him, his name's meaning (although this is a name given to him), his job, country and an act of extraordinary commitment to the movement. It seems instant and total faith.

Something interesting here, although they did not inherit land, Levites do not seem to have been disbarred from owning land.

Num 18:24 For the tithe of the children of Israel, which they offer as a wave offering to Yahweh, I have given to the Levites for an inheritance. Therefore I have said to them, Among the children of Israel they shall have no inheritance.

Deu 10:8 At that time Yahweh set apart the tribe of Levi, to bear the ark of Yahweh's covenant, to stand before Yahweh to minister to him, and to bless in his name, to this day. Deu 10:9 Therefore Levi has no portion nor inheritance with his brothers; Yahweh is his inheritance, according as Yahweh your God spoke to him.)

There were two among the apostles that were called Boanerges, sons of thunder (Mark 3:17); now here was a son of consolation with them.

He having land he sold it, not to buy elsewhere to advantage, but, as a Levite indeed, who knew he had the Lord God of Israel for his inheritance, he despised earthly inheritances, would be encumbered no more with them, but brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet, to be given in charity.

By doing this as one that was designed to be a preacher of the gospel, he disentangled himself from the affairs of this life: and he lost nothing by laying the purchase money at the apostles' feet, when he himself was, in effect, numbered among the apostles, by that later word of the Holy Ghost, *Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them*, Acts 13:2. Thus, for the respect he showed to the apostles as apostles, he had an apostle's reward.

Luke continues to focus on the true people of God, this second "summary passage" (cf. 2:42-47) describes the outworking of the unity of God's people. They are "of one heart and soul" and as before, they express this unity in their care for the needs of God's people (4:34). Thus, like the summary in 2:45, this is "needs based" selling and not compulsory.

In this summary, however, there is greater focus on the apostles as the leaders of God's true people. The apostles continue to proclaim the lordship of Jesus, and they are the ones to whom the proceeds from these sales are brought (4:35, 37). As Luke does from time to time, he introduces a character briefly who will become more prominent later in the narrative (e.g., Saul in 8:1-3). Barnabas is introduced as a specific example of the generosity of the believers, as a contrasting example to Ananias and Sapphira in the following verses, and in anticipation of his ministry with Paul later in the narrative (9:27; 11:22-30; 13:1-15:41). Barnabas was actually a nickname meaning "son of encouragement"; in other words, he was characterised by being encouraging. Also, in contrast to the opposition of the priestly leadership of Israel, Barnabas was a Levite who submitted to Jesus' authorized representatives, the apostles.

Ananias and Sapphira.

Act 5:1 But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession, Act 5:2 And kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles' feet. Act 5:3 But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land? Act 5:4 Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God. Act 5:5 And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all them that heard these things. Act 5:6 And the young men arose, wound him up, and carried him out, and buried him. Act 5:7 And it was about the space of three hours after, when his wife, not knowing what was done, came in. Act 5:8 And Peter answered unto her, Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much? And she said, Yea, for so much. Act 5:9 Then Peter said unto her, How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord?

behold, the feet of them which have buried thy husband are at the door, and shall carry thee out. Act 5:10 Then fell she down straightway at his feet, and yielded up the ghost: and the young men came in, and found her dead, and, carrying her forth, buried her by her husband. Act 5:11 And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things.

We have heard of the generous Barnabus and here is the exact opposite for comparison. Our commitment to Christ must be all or it is nothing.

This is the first use of the word church in the Book of Acts. "The word is better rendered congregation or assembly to distance it from the modern understanding of a formal physical building and structure of worship.

Remember what Jesus said to Peter?

Mat 16:16 And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. Mat 16:17 And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. Mat 16:18 And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. Mat 18:17 And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.

How does Peter know that they are cheating? It probably was the Holy Spirit's revelation,

Punishment is immediate and they both are accountable. The crime is not holding back because they were at liberty to give only a portion, the crime is lying to God.

The same word is used in Titus.

Tit 2:9 Exhort servants to be obedient unto their own masters, and to please them well in all things; not answering again; Tit 2:10 Not purloining, but shewing all good fidelity; that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things.

The chapter begins with a melancholy "but", which puts a stop to the pleasant and agreeable prospect of things which we had in the previous chapters; as every man, so every church, in its best state has its "but".

The early disciples were very holy and seemed to be all exceedingly good, but there were hypocrites among them, whose hearts were not right in the sight of *God*, who, when they were baptised and took upon them the form of godliness, denied the power of godliness, and stopped short of that.

There is a mixture of bad with good in the best societies on this side of heaven, tares will grow among the wheat until the harvest.

The signs and wonders which the apostles wrought were til now miracles of mercy, but now comes in a miracle of judgement, and here is an instance of

severity following the instances of goodness, that God may be both loved and feared.

Observe here,

The sin of Ananias and Sapphira his wife. It is good to see husband and wife joining together in that which is good, but to be confederate in evil is to be like Adam and Eve, when they agreed to eat the forbidden fruit, and were one in their disobedience. Now their sin was, that they were ambitious of being thought eminent disciples, and of the first rank, when really they were not true disciples; they would pass for some of the most fruitful trees in Christ's vineyard, when really the root of the matter was not found in them.

There are echoes of Matthew here.

Mat 19:20 The young man saith unto him, All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet? Mat 19:21 Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me. Mat 19:22 But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions.

They sold a possession, and brought the money (as Barnabas did) to the apostles' feet, that they might not seem to be behind the very chief of believers, but might be applauded and cried up, and stand so much the fairer for preferment in the church, which perhaps they thought would shortly shine in secular pomp and grandeur.

Ananias and Sapphira would take upon them a profession of Christianity, and make a fair show in the flesh with it, and so would mock God, and deceive others, when they knew they could not go through with the Christian profession. It was commendable, and so far it was right, in that rich young man, that he would not pretend to follow Christ, when, if it should come to a pinch, he knew he could not come up to his terms, but he went away sorrowful.

Ananias and Sapphira pretended they could come up to the terms, that they might have the credit of being disciples, when really they could not, and so were a discredit to discipleship. It is often of fatal consequence for people to go a greater length in profession than their inward principle will admit of. That they were covetous of the wealth of the world, and distrustful of God and His providence: They sold their land, and perhaps then, in a pang of zeal, designed no other than to dedicate the whole of the purchase-money to pious uses, and made a vow, or at least conceived a full purpose, to do so; but, when the money was received, their heart failed them, and they kept back part of the price, because they loved the money, and thought it was too much to part with at once, and to trust in the apostles' hands, and because they knew not but they might want it themselves, though now all things were common, yet it would not be so long, and what should they do in a time of need, if they should leave themselves nothing to take to?

They could not take God's word that they should be provided for, but thought they would play a wiser part than the rest had done, and lay up for a rainy day. Thus they thought to serve both God and mammon. God, by bringing part of the money to the apostles' feet, and mammon, by keeping the other part in their

own pockets; as if there were not an all-sufficiency in God to make up the whole to them, except they retained some in their own hands by way of caution-money. Their hearts were divided, so they were found faulty, Hos. 10:2. They halted between two, if they had been thorough-paced worldlings, they would not have sold their possession; and, if they had been thorough-paced Christians, they would not have retained part of the price. That they thought to deceive the apostles, and make them believe they brought the whole purchase-money, when really it was but a part. They came with as good an assurance, and as great a show of piety and devotion, as any of them, and laid the money at the apostles' feet, as if it were their all. They dissembled with God and His Spirit, with Christ and His church and ministers; and this was their sin.

The impression that this made upon the people. Great fear came upon all that heard these things, that heard what Peter said, and saw what followed; or upon all that heard the story of it; for, no doubt, it was all the talk of the city. And again (Acts 5:11), Great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things. Those that had joined themselves to the church were struck with an awe of God and of his judgements, and with a greater veneration for this dispensation of the Spirit which they were now under. It was not a check to their holy joy, but it taught them to be serious in it, and to rejoice with trembling. All that laid their money at the apostles' feet after this were afraid of keeping back any part of the price.

Many Signs and Wonders Done.

Act 5:12 And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people; (and they were all with one accord in Solomon's porch. Act 5:13 And of the rest durst no man join himself to them: but the people magnified them. Act 5:14 And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women.) Act 5:15 Insomuch that they brought forth the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and couches, that at the least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them. Act 5:16 There came also a multitude out of the cities round about unto Jerusalem, bringing sick folks, and them which were vexed with unclean spirits: and they were healed every one.

We have here an account of the progress of the gospel, notwithstanding this terrible judgement inflicted upon two hypocrites.

We are told the effects of these miracles which the apostles wrought.

The church was hereby kept together, and confirmed in its adherence both to the apostles and to one another:

They met in the temple, in the open place that was called Solomon's porch. It was strange that the rulers of the temple allowed them to keep their meeting there. But God inclined their hearts to tolerate them there awhile, for the more convenient spreading of the gospel; and those who permitted buyers and sellers

could not for shame prohibit such preachers and healers there. They all met in public worship.

They were there with one accord, unanimous in their doctrine, worship, and discipline; and there was no discontent nor murmuring about the death of Ananias and Sapphira, as there was against Moses and Aaron about the death of Korah and his company. The separation of hypocrites, by distinguishing judgements, should make the sincere cleave so much the closer to each other and to the gospel ministry._

The church increased in number (Acts 5:14), Believers were the more added to the Lord, and no doubt joined themselves to the church, when they saw that God was in it of a truth, even multitudes both of men and women. They were so far from being deterred by the example that was made of Ananias and Sapphira that they were rather invited by it into a society that kept such a strict discipline. Believers are added to the Lord Jesus, joined to Him. Notice is taken of the conversion of women as well as men; more notice than generally was in the Jewish church, in which they neither received the sign of circumcision nor were obliged to attend the solemn feasts, and the court of the women was one of the outer courts of the temple. But, as among those that followed Christ while He was upon earth, so among those that believed on Him after He went to heaven, great notice was taken of the good women.

See here Luke splits out the physically sick and the spiritually sick. *Act 5:16 There came also a multitude out of the cities round about unto Jerusalem, bringing sick folks, and them which were vexed with unclean spirits: and they were healed every one.*

The apostles had abundance of patients, and gained abundance of reputation both to themselves and their doctrine by the cure of them all. So many signs and wonders were wrought by the apostles that all manner of people put in for the benefit of them, both in city and country, and had it. In the city they brought forth their sick into the streets; for it is probable that the priests would not suffer them to bring them into the temple to Solomon's porch, and the apostles had not leisure to go to the houses of them all.

Why a shadow? What other strange methods of healing are there in the Bible?

There was an expectation of miracles among the early Christians.

They brought the sick out into the streets and laid them on beds and couches, that at least the shadow of Peter passing by might fall on some of them. Also a multitude gathered from the surrounding cities to Jerusalem, bringing sick people and those who were tormented by unclean spirits, and they were all healed.

Our text does not specifically say people were healed by Peter's shadow, it merely tells us people thought it would happen, and they took action based on this belief. We don't know if people were actually healed when the shadow of Peter passed over them.

It may sound crazy that one could be healed by the touch of a shadow, but we know a touch of Jesus' clothing healed a woman (Luke 8:44). There wasn't anything magical in the garment, but it was a way that her faith was released.

"It may be significant that the verb episkiazo, which Luke chooses, meaning 'to overshadow', he has used twice in his Gospel of the overshadowing of God's presence." (Stott)

Luk 1:35 And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.

Luk 9:33 And it came to pass, as they departed from him, Peter said unto Jesus, Master, it is good for us to be here: and let us make three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias: not knowing what he said. Luk 9:34 While he thus spake, there came a cloud, and overshadowed them: and they feared as they entered into the cloud.

Firstly, the text never actually says that his shadow healed them, just that the people set out their sick so that Peter's shadow would touch them. Verse 16 does say that all were being healed, but it doesn't explicitly say that it was because of the shadow.

Secondly, it isn't unheard of that miracles like this could occur. Paul's handkerchief was used for healings in Ephesus (Acts 19:11-12), and a woman found healing by simply touching Jesus' tunic (Luk. 7:1-10).

Act 19:11 And God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul: Act 19:12 So that from his body were brought unto the sick handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out of them.

Note that on only four occasions did Jesus heal remotely: the daughter of the Greek woman (Mark 7: 25-30); the centurion's servant (Matthew 8: 5-13; Luke 7: 1-10); the nobleman's son (John 4: 46-53); and the opportunistic healing of the woman who touched the hem of His garment (Mark 5: 24-34; when this miracle occurred, Jesus was on His way to heal the daughter of Jairus). Nowhere is it said that Jesus healed through the distribution of 'handkerchiefs and aprons' or called on the crowds to simply touch Him. In short, it was rare for the healing to be conferred other than in the presence of the healer.

Act 5:13 And of the rest durst no man join himself to them: but the people magnified them.

John Gill comments. By the rest are meant, either those that were without the church, and those either the profane and persecuting sort, who durst not come nigh the apostles to touch them, or say one word to them, for fear of being struck dead; and so the Ethiopic version renders it, "and then there was no more any man that durst restrain them", or go about to hinder them from preaching: or the better sort, such who attended on the word, and were either real believers or hypocrites, who durst not, one nor the other, join themselves to them, because of what happened to Ananias and Sapphira; which not only deterred

hypocrites from coming into the church, but also kept off such who were really converted persons; but this sense seems to be contradicted in the following verse. Rather therefore by them are meant those within the church, and not only the private members of it, but the ministers of the word, of which number Ananias might have been; these, the rest of them, durst not come nigh the apostles, or familiarly converse with them, much less put themselves upon an equal foot with them, but with great reverence of them kept their distance from them, but the people magnified them; both the ministers of the word, as Barnabas and others, who showed such a respect to the apostles, they having extraordinary gifts, and extraordinary things also being done by them, and especially the twelve apostles, these the people in general spoke well of, praised and cried up as marvellous men, because of what was done by them.

We can trust that Luke is not merely recording legends. From what we know of physicians, even in those days, we cannot assume that Luke would gullibly accept stories of 'miraculous healing' without investigating them.

They were all healed: However God chose to bring the healing there is no doubt that a remarkable work of healing was present. We shouldn't miss the connection between the purity preserved in the first part of the chapter (with the death of Ananias and the fear of God among the Christians) and the power displayed here.

A multitude gathered from the surrounding cities to Jerusalem. This is the first mention of the work extending beyond Jerusalem. People came there instead of the apostles going to them. This was exciting, but not exactly according to the command of Jesus. He told the disciples to go out to Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth (Acts 1:8). The apostles didn't leave Jerusalem until they were forced to by persecution (Acts 8:1, 12:1-2).

I also note that there is an alarming man worship insinuated here with the people magnifying the disciples. This is to me a red flag in the early days.

The Apostles Arrested and Freed.

Act 5:17 Then the high priest rose up, and all they that were with him, (which is the sect of the Sadducees,) and were filled with indignation, Act 5:18 And laid their hands on the apostles, and put them in the common prison. Act 5:19 But the angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors, and brought them forth, and said, Act 5:20 Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life. Act 5:21 And when they heard that, they entered into the temple early in the morning, and taught. But the high priest came, and they that were with him, and called the council together, and all the senate of the children of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought. Act 5:22 But when the officers came, and found them not in the prison, they returned, and told, Act 5:23 Saying, The prison truly found we shut with all safety, and the keepers standing without before the doors: but when we had opened, we found no man within. Act 5:24 Now when the high priest and the captain of the temple and the chief priests heard these things, they doubted of them whereunto this would grow.

Clearly we celebrated too soon, the freedom of speaking in Solomon's porch was not to last.

Who were their enemies and persecutors? The high priest was the ringleader, Annas or Caiaphas, who saw their wealth and dignity, their power and tyranny, that is their all, at stake, and inevitably lost, if the spiritual and heavenly doctrine of Christ should get ground and prevail among the people. No more sacrificing, no more tithe income, no jobs.

Those that joined with the high priest were the sect of the Sadducees, who had a particularly enmity to the gospel of Christ, because it confirmed and established the doctrine of the invisible world, the resurrection of the dead, and the future state, all of which they denied.

When they heard and saw what flocking there was to the apostles, and how considerable they were becoming, they rose up in a passion, as men that could no longer bear it, and were resolved against it, being filled with indignation at the apostles for preaching the doctrine of Christ, and curing the sick, at the people for hearing them, and bringing the sick to them to be cured, and at themselves and their own party for suffering this matter to go so far, and not knocking it on the head at first.

Thus are the enemies of Christ and His gospel a torment to themselves. They laid their hands on them, perhaps their very own hands (so low did their malice make them stoop), or, rather, the hands of their officers, and put them in the common prison, among the worst of malefactors.

They probably hoped to do a number of things by this.

1. To put a restraint upon them; though they could not lay anything criminal to their charge worthy of death or of bonds, yet while they had them in prison they kept them from going on in their work, and this they reckoned a good point gained.
2. To put a terror upon them, and so to drive them off from their work. The last time they had them before them, they only threatened them and then released them (Acts 4:21); but now, finding that this had not worked, they imprison them, to make them afraid.
3. To disgrace them, and therefore they chose to lock them up in the common prison, that, being thus vilified, the people might not, as they had done, magnify them. Satan has carried on his design against the gospel very much by making the preachers and professors of it appear despicable.

This is not one apostle alone in a cell it is all of them!

God sent his angel to release them out of prison, and to renew their commission to preach the gospel. The powers of darkness fight against them, but the Father fights for them, and sends an angel to plead their cause. The Lord will never desert His witnesses, His advocates, but will certainly stand by them, and bear them out.

The apostles are discharged, from their imprisonment. The angel of the Lord by night, in spite of all the locks and bars that were upon them, opened the prison doors, and, in spite of all the vigilance and resolution of the keepers that stood outside the doors, brought forth the prisoners, gave them authority to go out and led them through all opposition. We are not told how long they were incarcerated, but Luke's release story coming one line after their arrest suggests not long at all.

The authorities opened the door in the morning and therefore after the release somebody shut the door, I wonder if it was a tidy angel or one of the disciples.

This deliverance is not so particularly related as that of Peter which we will see later (Acts 12:7); but the miracle here was the very same. There is no prison so dark, so strong, but God can both visit his people in it, and, if He please fetch them out of it. It is also the Angel of the Lord both times, perhaps there is a freedom angel.

Other incredible escapes will follow. The mission will not be derailed by incarceration and the Christians can remember this example to give them hope.

In the Bible, so many of God's people end up in prison. Joseph, Samson, Jeremiah, Daniel, John the Baptist, Peter, John, James, Paul, Silas, Aristarchus, Andronicus, Junias and many more all spent time behind the walls and bars of prison.

We have one of Isaiah's great Messianic prophecies that the Suffering Servant would set captives free, a prophecy which Jesus applied to Himself at the beginning of His ministry. It is literally fulfilled and spiritually fulfilled.

Isa 61:1 The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me; because the Lord has anointed Me to preach good news to the meek; He has sent Me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound

Luk 4:17 And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written, Luk 4:18 The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, Luk 4:19 To preach the acceptable year of the Lord.

The angel is not an invisible presence, it speaks to them. They are charged to go on with their work and discharged from the prohibition which the high priest laid them under. The angel bade them, Go, stand, and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life.

When they were miraculously set at liberty, they must not think it was that they might save their lives by making their escape out of the hands of their enemies. No, it was that they might go on with their work with so much the more boldness.

Recoveries from sickness, releases out of trouble, are granted us, and are to be looked upon by us as granted, not that we may enjoy the comforts of our life, but that God may be honoured with the service of our life.

The angel tells them:

Where they must preach: Speak in the temple. One would think, though they might not quit their work, it might have been prudent to go on with it in a more private place, where it would give less offence to the priests than in the temple, and so would the less expose them. No, "Speak in the temple, for this is the place of concourse, this is your Father's house, and it is not to be as yet quite left desolate." It is not for the preachers of the gospel to retire into corners, as long as they can have any opportunity of preaching in the great congregation.

To whom they must preach: "Speak to the people; not to the princes and rulers, for they will not hearken; but to the people, who are willing and desirous to be taught, and whose souls are as precious to Christ, and ought to be so to you, as the souls of the greatest. Speak to the people, to all in general, for all are concerned."

How they must preach: Go, stand, and speak, which intimates, not only they must speak publicly, stand up and speak, that all may hear; but that they must speak boldly and resolutely.

What they must speak: All the words of this life. "Go, and preach the same to the world, that others may be comforted with the same comforts with which you yourselves are comforted of God." Or, "of this life which the Sadducees deny, and therefore persecute you; preach this, though you know it is this that they have indignation at." Or, "of this life emphatically; this heavenly, divine life, in comparison with which the present earthly life does not deserve the name." Or, "*these words of life*, the very same you have preached, these words which the Holy Ghost puts into your mouth."

The gospel is the word of this life, for it secures to us the privileges of our way as well as those of our home, and the promises of the life that now is as well as of that to come. And yet even spiritual and eternal life are brought so much to light in the gospel that they may be called this life, for the word is nigh thee. The gospel is concerning matters of life and death, and ministers must preach it and people hear it accordingly. They must speak all the words of this life, and not conceal any for fear of offending, or in hope of ingratiating themselves with their rulers. Christ's witnesses are sworn to speak the whole truth.

They went on with their work (Acts 5:21): When they heard this, when they heard that it was the will of God that they should continue to preach in the temple, they returned to Solomon's porch, Acts 5:12.

It must have been a great satisfaction to them to have these fresh orders. Perhaps they began to question whether, if they had their liberty, they should preach as publicly in the temple as they had done, because they had been told previously, when they were persecuted in one city, to flee to another. But, now that the angel ordered them to go preach in the temple, their way was plain, and they ventured without any difficulty, entered into the temple, and feared not the face of man. If we may but be satisfied with our duty, our business is to keep close to this, and then we may cheerfully trust God with our safety.

They obey immediately without dispute or delay. They enter into the temples early in the morning (as soon as the gates were opened, and people began to

come together there), and taught them and did not at all fear what man could do unto them.

The high priest and his party went on with their prosecution. They, supposing they had the apostles under lock and key, called the council together, a great and extraordinary council, for they summoned all the senate of the children of Israel.

So who was called?

The council comprised the Sanhedrim, consisting of seventy one, which usually met at the time of the morning daily sacrifice; perhaps on this occasion they might be called together sooner, and everyone of them summoned to attend; for otherwise it was not necessary that every particular member should be present, but when there was any business of importance which required it, they were all gathered together.

The senate of the children of Israel or the elders, as the Vulgate Latin, Syriac, and Arabic versions read, the rest of the elders of the city, besides those of the great Sanhedrim. Dr. Lightfoot thinks, that the two other Sanhedrim, or courts of judicature in Jerusalem, which consisted of twenty three persons apiece, are designed; and who, as he rightly observes from Maimonides (p), sat the one in the gate of the court, the other in the gate of the mountain of the house; so that all the courts in Jerusalem were called together at this time; and if they all met, they made up a hundred and seventeen men.

Prisoners Before the Council.

Act 5:25 Then came one and told them, saying, Behold, the men whom ye put in prison are standing in the temple, and teaching the people. Act 5:26 Then went the captain with the officers, and brought them without violence: for they feared the people, lest they should have been stoned. Act 5:27 And when they had brought them, they set them before the council: and the high priest asked them, Act 5:28 Saying, Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name? and, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us. Act 5:29 Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men. Act 5:30 The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. Act 5:31 Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. Act 5:32 And we are his witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him. Act 5:33 When they heard that, they were cut to the heart, and took counsel to slay them. Act 5:34 Then stood there up one in the council, a Pharisee, named Gamaliel, a doctor of the law, had in reputation among all the people, and commanded to put the apostles forth a little space; Act 5:35 And said unto them, Ye men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what ye intend to do as touching these men. Act 5:36 For before these days rose up Theudas, boasting himself to be somebody; to whom a number of men, about four hundred, joined themselves: who was slain; and all, as many as obeyed him, were scattered, and brought to nought. Act 5:37 After this man rose up Judas of Galilee in the days of the taxing, and drew away much people after him: he also

perished; and all, even as many as obeyed him, were dispersed. Act 5:38 And now I say unto you, Refrain from these men, and let them alone: for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought: Act 5:39 But if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God. Act 5:40 And to him they agreed: and when they had called the apostles, and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. Act 5:41 And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name. Act 5:42 And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ.

Act 5:26 Then went the captain with the officers, and brought them without violence: for they feared the people, lest they should have been stoned.

For they feared the people. The hearts of the religious leaders were exposed. They feared the people, but they did not fear God who clearly showed that He was at work among the disciples.

When the High Priest lists their charges, preaching when told not to in the name of Jesus, Peter and the others summarise their previous sermon and state their allegiance to obey God and preach Jesus.

The God of our fathers raised up Jesus. This was a testimony faithful to the foundation of the Christian faith. Peter spoke of:

- Man's guilt (Jesus whom you murdered).
- Jesus' death (hanging on a tree).
- Jesus' resurrection (Him God exalted to His right hand).
- Man's responsibility to respond (to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins).

Act 5:33 When they heard that, they were cut to the heart, and took counsel to slay them.

The same phrase is used after Stephen's death speech.

Act 7:54 When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth.

They were furious, Peter and the apostles had clearly and briefly explained to them (again) the core message of who Jesus was, what He did for all of us on the cross, and how we should respond to who Jesus is and what He did. Their reaction was furious anger.

A death warrant seems to be in the offing, but there is an unlikely rescuer.

We get to meet one of the accusers.

Act 5:34 Then stood there up one in the council, a Pharisee, named Gamaliel, a doctor of the law, had in reputation among all the people, and commanded to put the apostles forth a little space;

Gamaliel cites two examples of “rebels” who when murdered saw their followers disperse spreading their message perhaps more speedily and effectively and his advice is simple.

Act 5:38 And now I say unto you, Refrain from these men, and let them alone: for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought: Act 5:39 But if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God.

Gamaliel had been Paul’s teacher. He was very astute and non-committal. He said, “Let us wait and see, the truth will conquer.” He expected that the new enthusiasm would die down if it were let alone. He knew that a draught of wind fans a fire.

We see the grave advice which Gamaliel, a leading man in the council, gave upon this occasion, the scope of which was to moderate the fury of these bigots, and check the violence of the prosecution. This Gamaliel is here said to be a Pharisee by his profession and sect, and by office a doctor of the law, one that studied the scriptures of the Old Testament, read lectures upon the sacred authors, and trained up pupils in the knowledge of them. Paul was brought up at his feet (Acts 22:3), and tradition says that so were Stephen and Barnabas, although I find no proof of this. Some say he was the son of that Simeon that took up Christ in his arms, when he was presented in the temple, and grandson of the famous Hillel. He is here said to be in reputation among all the people for his wisdom and conduct, it appearing by this passage that he was a moderate man, and not apt to go in with furious measures.

This grandson of the esteemed Hillel was the founder of Israel’s strongest school of religion. Gamaliel was given the title *Rabban* (“our teacher”), which was a step above the title *Rab* (“teacher”) or *Rabbi* (“my teacher”).

The Mishnah wrote of Gamaliel: “Since Rabban Gamaliel the elder died there has been no more reverence for the law; and purity and abstinence died out at the same time.”

Significantly, Gamaliel was a Pharisee. Though the Sadducees had more political power (Acts 5:17), it was politically foolish for the Sadducees to ask the Romans to execute the apostles without support from the Pharisees. Gamaliel spoke for himself and not for God.

Gamaliel was really a fence sitter. He spoke as if they should wait and see if Jesus and the apostles were really from God. But what greater testimony did he need, beyond Jesus’ resurrection and the apostles’ miracles? He took a “wait-and-see” attitude when there was plenty of evidence.

Remember his name we will hear more of him later. Let us see who else he name drops.

Act 5:36 For before these days rose up Theudas, boasting himself to be somebody; to whom a number of men, about four hundred, joined themselves: who was slain; and all, as many as obeyed him, were scattered, and brought to nought. Act 5:37 After this man rose up Judas of Galilee in the days of the taxing, and drew away much people after him: he also perished; and all, even as many as obeyed him, were dispersed.

Josephus, the Jewish historian, mentioned a Theudas who led a rebellion, but at a later point than this. It could be that Josephus had his dates mixed up or that this was a different Theudas (it was a common name). Josephus did also describe a Judas of Galilee (*Antiquities*, 18.1.1, 2, 6 and 20.5.2) who may be the same one mentioned here.

The court agrees with Gamaliel's argument.

Act 5:40 And to him they agreed: and when they had called the apostles, and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.

Why beat them? The leaders thought they could intimidate and discourage the apostles with a beating. Instead, they left rejoicing. They were not rejoicing that they suffered, but that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. It was a privilege to be associated with Jesus in any circumstance, even to suffer shame.

Act 5:41 And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name.

They bore their sufferings with an invincible cheerfulness. They reckoned it an honour, looked upon it that they were counted worthy to suffer shame, that they were honoured to be dishonoured for Christ. They rejoiced in it, remembering what their Master had said to them at their first setting out (Matt. 5:11, 12): *When men shall revile you, and persecute you, rejoice and be exceedingly glad.* They rejoiced, not only though they suffered shame (their troubles did not diminish their joy), their troubles increased their joy, and added to it. If we suffer ill for doing well, provided we suffer it well, and as we should, we ought to rejoice in that grace which enables us so to do.

The apostles return to their new lives immediately.

Act 5:42 And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ.

Regardless of the circumstances we have a result. You have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine. The accusation of the High Priest was a wonderful testimony to

the effectiveness of the message preached by the apostles. Their message had filled Jerusalem.

Chosen to Serve

From this point in Acts at chapter 6 we see the touch paper of evangelism lit.

In this chapter we have:

- The discontent that was among the disciples about the distribution of the public charity.
- The election and ordination of seven men, who should take care of that matter, and ease the apostles of the burden.
- The increase of the church, by the addition of many to it.
- A particular account of Stephen, one of the seven.
- His great activity for Christ.
- The opposition he met with from the enemies of Christianity, and his disputes with them.
- The convening of him before the Great Sanhedrin and the crimes laid to his charge.
- God owning him upon his trial.

Seven Chosen to Serve

Act 6:1 And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration. Act 6:2 Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables. Act 6:3 Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. Act 6:4 But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word. Act 6:5 And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch: Act 6:6 Whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them. Act 6:7 And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.

Up until this point satan's attacks on the church came on many different fronts. He attempted many forms of direct opposition and intimidation, and he tried to corrupt the church from within. These strategies were all unsuccessful in stopping or slowing the work of the church. Now Satan hoped to "divide and conquer" by raising one group of Christians against another.

We can say that with Acts Chapters 5 and 6, the good old days were over for the earliest Christians. They now had to deal with internal corruption, disputes and potential divisions. How they dealt with those things made all the difference.

When the number of disciples was multiplying indicating that the work of God's kingdom through the early Christian community was still highly successful, they dealt with the problems well.

The mention of growth again reminds us that the early church was organised. They knew how many were saved, they met together in specific places and specific times. Money and goods were collected and distributed to those in need. Sin was confronted and dealt with. All these indicate at least some level of organisation.

The daily distribution: The early church took its responsibility to help support widows seriously because they often had no other support; but they also expected these widows to serve the church faithfully.

There is the hint here of a growing division between the religious leaders and the early followers of Jesus. The care of widows and orphans was an important part of Jewish life, and normally the temple authorities organised the distribution to the needy. Yet it seems that the Christian widows were perhaps not cared for by the Jewish leaders; probably because they didn't like the fact that the apostles kept preaching Jesus when they were told to stop.

Stephen Philip, Prochorus... The seven men all had Greek names and Nicholas was from Antioch, indicating that they were probably Hellenists themselves. The people (and the apostles) showed great sensitivity to the offended Hellenists by appointing Hellenists to take care of the widows' distribution.

It does our hearts good to find that the number of the disciples is multiplied, as it vexed the priests and Sadducees to the heart to see it. The opposition that the preaching of the gospel met with, instead of checking its progress, contributed to the success of it, and this Christian church, the more it was afflicted, the more it multiplied. The preachers were beaten, threatened, and abused, and yet the people received their doctrine, attracted, no doubt, thereto by their wonderful patience and cheerfulness under their trials, which convinced men that they were borne up and carried on by a better spirit than their own.

It casts a dampener upon us to find that the multiplying of the disciples proves an occasion for discord. Until now they were all with one accord. This had often been taken notice of to their honour; but now that they were multiplied, they began to murmur as in the old world, when men began to multiply, they corrupted themselves. Thou hast multiplied the nation, and not increased their joy, Isa 9:3. When Abraham and Lot increased their families, there was strife between their herdsmen, so it was here. There arose a murmuring, not an open falling out, but a secret heart-burning.

The complaint of these Grecians was that their widows were neglected in the daily administration, that is in the distribution of the public charity, and the Hebrew widows had more care taken of them. Observe, The first contention in the Christian church was about a money-matter; but it is a pity that the little things of this world should be issues among those that profess to be taken up

with the great things of another world. A great deal of money was gathered for the relief of the poor, but, as often happens in such cases, it was impossible to please everybody in the distribution of it.

The apostles, at whose feet it was laid, did their best to dispose of it so as to answer the intentions of the donors, and no doubt tried to do it with the utmost impartiality, and were far from respecting the Hebrews more than the Grecians; and yet here they are complained to, and tacitly complained of, that the Grecian widows were neglected, though they were as real objects of charity, yet they had not so much allowed them, or not to so many, or not so duly paid them, as the Hebrews.

Perhaps this complaint was groundless and unjust, and there was no cause for it, but those who, upon any account, lie under disadvantages (as the Grecian Jews did, in comparison with those that were Hebrews of the Hebrews) are apt to be jealous that they are slighted when really they are not so and it is the common fault of poor people that, instead of being thankful for what is given them, they are querulous and clamorous, and apt to find fault that more is not given them, or that more is given to others than to them and there are envy and covetousness, those roots of bitterness, to be found among the poor as well as among the rich, notwithstanding the humbling providences they are under, and should accommodate themselves to.

But we will suppose there might be some occasion for their complaint.

Firstly, Some suggest that though their other poor were well provided for, yet their widows were neglected, because the managers governed themselves by an ancient rule which the Hebrews observed, that a widow was to be maintained by her husband's children. *1Ti 5:4 But if any widow have children or nephews, let them learn first to shew piety at home, and to requite their parents: for that is good and acceptable before God.*

Secondly, I take it that the widows are put here for all the poor, because many of those that were in the church book, and received alms, were widows, who were well provided for by the industry of their husbands while they lived, but were reduced to straits when they were gone. As those that have the administration of public justice ought in a particular manner to protect widows from injury, so those that have the administration of public charity ought in a particular manner to provide for widows what is necessary.

1Ti 5:3 Honour widows that are widows indeed. The widows here, and the other poor, had a daily ministration, perhaps they wanted forecast, and could not save for hereafter, and therefore the managers of the fund, in kindness to them, gave them day by day their daily bread; they lived from hand to mouth. Now, it seems, the Grecian widows were, comparatively, neglected. Perhaps those that disposed of the money considered that there was more brought into the fund by the rich Hebrews than by the rich Grecians, who had not estates to sell, as the Hebrews had, and therefore the poor Grecians should have less out of the fund; this, though there was some tolerant reason for it, they thought hard and unfair.

In the best-ordered church in the world there will be something amiss, some maladministration or other, some grievances, or at least some complaints, those are the best that have the least and the fewest.

The apostles had it implied been involved in the directing of the matter. Applications were made to them, and appeals in cases of grievances. They were obliged to employ persons under them, who did not take all the care they might have taken, nor were so well fortified as they should have been against temptations to partiality; and therefore some persons must be chosen to manage this matter who have more leisure to attend to it than the apostles had, and were better qualified for the trust than those whom the apostles employed were.

Now we are given quite some information on the resolution of this issue.

How the method was proposed by the apostles. They called the multitude of the disciples unto them, the heads of the congregations of Christians in Jerusalem, the principal leading men. The twelve themselves would not determine anything without them, for in multitude of counsellors there is safety; and in an affair of this nature those might be best able to advise who were more conversant in the affairs of this life than the apostles were.

Pro 24:6 For by wise counsel thou shalt make thy war: and in multitude of counsellors there is safety.

The apostles' state that they could by no means allow so great a diversion, as this would be, from their great work. It is not reasonable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. This has echoes for me of Mary and Martha. The receiving and paying of money was serving tables, too like the tables of the money-changers in the temple. This was foreign to the business which the apostles were called to. They were to preach the word of God and though they had not such occasion to study for what they preached as we have (it being given in that same hour what they should speak), *Mat 10:19 But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak.* They thought that was work enough for a whole man, and to employ all their thoughts, and cares, and time. If they serve tables, they must, in some measure, leave the word of God, they could not attend their preaching work as closely as they ought.

Though this serving of tables was for pious uses, and serving the charity of rich Christians and the necessity of poor Christians, and in both serving Christ, yet the apostles would not take so much time from their preaching as this would require. They will no more be drawn from their preaching by the money laid at their feet than they will be driven from it by the stripes laid on their backs. While the number of the disciples was small, the apostles might manage this matter without making it any considerable interruption to their main business, but, now that their number was increased, they could not do it. It is not reasonable it is not fit, or commendable, that we should neglect the business of feeding souls with the bread of life, to attend the business of relieving the bodies of the poor.

Preaching the gospel is the best work, and the most proper and needful that a minister can be employed in, and that which he must give himself wholly to, which that he may do, he must not entangle himself in the affairs of this life, no, not in the outward business of the house of God.

1Ti 4:15 Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all

2Ti 2:3 Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. 2Ti 2:4 No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier.

Neh 11:16 And Shabbethai and Jozabad, of the chief of the Levites, had the oversight of the outward business of the house of God.

They therefore desire that seven men might be chosen, well qualified for the purpose, whose business it should be to serve tables, to be deacons to the tables. The business must be minded, must be better minded than it had been, and than the apostles could mind it, and therefore proper persons must be chosen, who though they might be occasionally employed in the word, and prayer, were not so entirely devoted to it as the apostles were, and these must take care of the church's stock, must review, and pay, and keep accounts, must buy those things which they had need of against the feast (John 13:29), and attend to all those things which are necessary, that everything might be done decently and in order and no person nor thing neglected.

The persons must be qualified. The people are to choose, and the apostles to ordain, but the people have no authority to choose, nor the apostles to ordain, men utterly unfit for the office: Look out seven men, so many they thought might suffice for the present, more might be added afterwards if there were occasion.

These must be:

Firstly, Of honest report, men free from scandal, that were looked upon by their neighbours as men of integrity, and faithful men, well attested, as men who might be trusted, not under a blemish for any vice, but, on the contrary, well spoken of for everything that is virtuous and praiseworthy, men that can produce good testimonials. Those that are employed in any office in the church ought to be men of honest report, of a blameless and admirable character, which is requisite not only to the credit of their office, but to the due discharge of it.

Secondly they must be full of the Holy Ghost, must be filled with those gifts and graces of the Holy Ghost which were necessary to the right management of this trust. They must not only be honest men, but they must be men of ability and men of courage. such as were to be made judges in Israel by Jethro. *Exo 18:21 Moreover thou shalt provide out of all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place such over them, to be rulers of thousands, and rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens: Exo 18:22 And let them judge the people at all seasons: and it shall be, that every great matter they shall bring unto thee, but every small matter they shall judge: so shall it be easier for thyself, and they shall bear the burden with thee.*

Thirdly they must be full of wisdom. It was not enough that they were honest, good men, but they must be discreet, judicious men, that could not be imposed upon, and would order things for the best, and with consideration, full of the Holy Ghost, and wisdom, that is, of the Holy Ghost as a Spirit of wisdom.

We find the word of wisdom given by the Spirit, is distinct from the word of knowledge by the same Spirit. *1Co 12:8 For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit;* Those must be

full of wisdom who are entrusted with public money, that it may be disposed of, not only with fidelity, but with frugality.

The people must nominate the persons. Look you out among yourselves seven men, consider among yourselves who are the fittest for such a trust, and whom you can with the most satisfaction confide in. They might be presumed to know better, or at least were fitter to enquire, what character men had, than the apostles and therefore they are entrusted with the choice.

The Word and Prayer

The apostles will welcome them to the service, will give them their charge, that they may know what they have to do and make conscience of doing it, and give them their authority, that the men may know whom they are to apply to, and submit to, in affairs of that nature.

The apostles want to focus on their work as ministers and to do this need to lose the admin.

What are the two great gospel ordinances, the word, and prayer? By these two communions between God and his people is kept up and maintained by the word He speaks to them, and by prayer they speak to Him and these have a mutual reference to each other. By these two the kingdom of Christ must be advanced, and additions made to it. By the word and prayer other ordinances are sanctified to us, and sacraments have their efficacy.

The great business of ministers and indeed all of us, is to give themselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word, they must still be either fitting and furnishing themselves for those services, or employing themselves in them.

The apostles were blessed with extraordinary gifts of the Holy Ghost, tongues and miracles, and yet that to which they gave themselves continually was preaching and praying, by which they might edify the church and those ministers, without doubt, are the successors of the apostles who give themselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word; and such Christ will always be with, even to the end of the world.

How was this proposal agreed to, and presently put in execution, by the disciples? It was not imposed upon them by an absolute power, though they might have been bold in Christ to do this, but proposed, as that which was highly convenient, and then the saying pleased the whole multitude. It pleased them to see the apostles so willing to have themselves discharged from intermeddling in secular affairs, and to transmit them to others, it pleased them to hear that they would give themselves to the word and prayer and therefore they neither disputed the matter nor deferred the execution of it.

It is not probable that they all cast their eye upon the same men. Everyone had his friend, whom he thought well of. But the majority of votes fell upon the persons here named and the rest both of the candidates and the electors acquiesced, and made no disturbance, as the members of societies in such cases

ought to do. An apostle, who was an extraordinary officer, was chosen by lot, which is more immediately the act of God, but the overseers of the poor were chosen by the suffrage of the people, in which yet a regard is to be had to the providence of God, who has all men's hearts and tongues in his hand.

We have a list of the persons chosen. Some think they were such as were before of the seventy disciples, but this is not proven, for they were ordained by Christ Himself, long since, to preach the gospel; and there was no more reason that they should leave the word of God to serve tables than that the apostles should. It is therefore more probable that they were of those that were converted since the pouring out of the Spirit, for it was promised to all that would be baptised that they should receive the gift of the Holy Ghost and the gift, according to that promise, is that fullness of the Holy Ghost which was required in those that were to be chosen to this service.

We may further conjecture, concerning these seven, that they were such as had sold their estates, and brought the money into the common stock; for those were fittest to be entrusted with the distribution of it who had been most generous in the contribution to it, although it would be foolish to broad brush assumptions since we hear later people stay at Philip's house. That these seven were all of the Grecian or Hellenist Jews, for they have all Greek names, and this would be most likely to silence the murmurings of the Grecians (which occasioned this institution), to have the trust lodged in those that were foreigners, like themselves, who would be sure not to neglect them. Nicolas, it is plain, was one of them, for he was a proselyte of Antioch, and some think the manner of expression intimates that they were all proselytes of Jerusalem, as he was of Antioch.

The first named is Stephen, the glory of these a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, he had a strong faith in the doctrine of Christ, and was full of it above most; full of fidelity, full of courage (so some), for he was full of the Holy Ghost, of his gifts and graces. He was an extraordinary man, and excelled in everything that was good, his name signifies a crown.

Phillip is put next, we hear later that he, having used this office of a deacon well, thereby obtained a good degree, was afterwards ordained to the office of an evangelist, a companion and assistant to the apostles. And his preaching and baptising (which we read of in Acts 8:12) were certainly not as a deacon (for it is plain that that office was serving tables, in opposition to the ministry of the word), but as an evangelist and, when he was preferred to that office, we have reason to think he quit this office, as incompatible with that.

The last named is Nicolas, who, some say, afterwards degenerated (as the Judas among these seven) and was the founder of the sect of the Nicolaitans which we read of ([Rev. 2:6, 15](#)), and which Christ there says, once and again, was a thing he hated. But some of the ancients clear him from this charge, and tell us that, though that vile impure sect denominated themselves from him, yet it was unjust.

The apostles appointed them to this work of serving tables for the present. The people presented them to the apostles, who blessed them.

They prayed with them, and for them, that God would give them more and more of the Holy Ghost and of wisdom, that He would qualify them for the service to which they were called, and own them in it, and make them thereby a blessing to the church, and particularly to the poor of the flock. All that are employed in the service of the church ought to be committed to the conduct of the divine grace by the prayers of the church.

They laid their hands on them, that is, they blessed them in the name of the Lord, for laying on hands was used in blessing, so Jacob blessed both the sons of Joseph and, without controversy, the less is blessed of the greater (Heb. 7:7), the deacons are blessed by the apostles, and the overseers of the poor by the pastors of the congregation. Having by prayer implored a blessing upon them, they did by the laying on of hands assure them that the blessing was conferred in answer to the prayer and this was giving them authority to execute that office, and laying an obligation upon the people to be observant of them therein.

When things were thus put into good order in the church (grievances were redressed and discontents silenced) then faith won ground.

The word of God increased. Now that the apostles resolved to stick more closely than ever to their preaching, it spread the gospel further, and brought it home with more power.

Christians became numerous. The number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly. When Christ was upon earth, His ministry had least success in Jerusalem; yet now that city affords most converts. God has His remnant even in the worst of places.

Act 6:7 And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.

A great company of the priests were obedient to the faith. This is very marvellous since they were the most inveterate enemies of the Gospel, and persecutors of the saints. It should seem, they came in a body, many of them agreed together, for the keeping up of one another's credit, and the strengthening of one another's hands, to join at once in giving up their names to Christ.

Stephen is Seized

Act 6:8 And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people. Act 6:9 Then there arose certain of the synagogue, which is called the synagogue of the Libertines, and Cyrenians, and Alexandrians, and of them of Cilicia and of Asia, disputing with Stephen. Act 6:10 And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake. Act 6:11 Then they suborned men, which said, We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses, and against God. Act 6:12 And they stirred up the people, and the

elders, and the scribes, and came upon him, and caught him, and brought him to the council, Act 6:13 And set up false witnesses, which said, This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law: Act 6:14 For we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us. Act 6:15 And all that sat in the council, looking stedfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel.

While the book before us is generally called Acts of the Apostles, there are also recorded Acts of other great servants of Jesus. In fact the term “Acts of the Apostles” is not a title proven to be given with Divine authority, we must remind ourselves that it is Luke’s second epistle (the first epistle being his so called Gospel, *Luk 1:1 Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us.*) and deals with the continuation of the works of Christ through His people. It is not strictly the record of Apostolic activities.

Here we come to Stephen. In fact we are given an insight into the lives of two men chosen for their qualities of godliness to be servants or deacons of the early church, Stephen and Philip. The power that accompanies that office was to be manifest in both and not the same ministry for ever. Perhaps people sorted themselves out. *1Ti 3:13 For they that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.*

Sadly, or so it appears, Stephen ascended rapidly and was soon lost to the early saints. We are not told how long he served as a deacon or when he became a preacher and miracle worker, perhaps they were all done at the same time. However we race from his election as a deacon immediately to his life story.

It is often considered that service is measured in years, as if a man has a right to be in office for a long season, yet some of Gods trees in nature flower rapidly and abundantly (flowering cherry) before swiftly fading. We cannot bargain or demand to have a long term service contract with the Lord, but we must be faithful and to that end. *Rev 2:10 Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.* Stephen has become an example of a martyr (or witness) even to Paul who was part of his execution party. *Act 22:20 And when the blood of thy martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by, and consenting unto his death, and kept the raiment of them that slew him.* The Lord may sow some of his best seed in death to reap a larger harvest.

Stephen was a gifted man. We are not certain of what signs and wonders that he did, but it is recorded that he did them. This is an important statement, for there are many who consider that signs were only worked by the Apostles. People do this in order to limit signs to that day and age, to die with the Apostles. We see recorded in Acts a disciple conveying to a future Apostle the Holy Spirit, this

should destroy the concept of Apostolic succession, for if it was essential where was another apostle to perform it? *Act 9:10 And there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias; and to him said the Lord in a vision, Ananias. And he said, Behold, I am here, Lord. Act 9:11 And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and enquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul, of Tarsus: for, behold, he prayeth, Act 9:12 And hath seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in, and putting his hand on him, that he might receive his sight.* Gifts and abilities are given by a Sovereign God to whomsoever He will.

Signs are tokens of anything by which anything is shown, hence weather patterns are tokens. *Mat 16:3 And in the morning, It will be foul weather to day: for the sky is red and lowring. O ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky; but can ye not discern the signs of the times?* The word semantics was originally applied to weather signs in the 17th Century, but later came to apply to language and words, that is what they signify. Semaphore is the conveying of a message by the flag signs. Signs accompanying the gospel are clearly supernatural and there is no reason to doubt that Stephen worked the supernatural. *Mar 16:17 And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; Mar 16:18 They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover. Act 2:17 And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams.* Signs are also confirmatory to the word. *Joh 11:45 Then many of the Jews which came to Mary, and had seen the things which Jesus did, believed on him.*

Yet as we have said before a lot of people are not convinced by signs and so it is that a dispute ensues between Stephen and the Jews.

The Scripture is silent as to the subject of the debate. It does not satisfy our curiosity, but merely points out the classes of people that refused his grace and wisdom.

It is clear that Stephen was confident with his material and knowledge of scripture, this we will see more clearly in Acts Chapter 7.

Many people are afraid of reasoning. The moment it starts to agitate people they reduce their effort, they are afraid of the consequences of their actions. They do not want to distress or upset people. That is perhaps why Sunday Schools flourish and adult assemblies do not. Children seldom kick back as a captive audience. Many strong things are said to children that should be said to adults and are not.

A surgeon does not withdraw the knife because he sees blood, but goes deeper to cut the sickness out. He does not do it with malice or anger, but with a professional calculating calm. A fireman does not leave a person in a burning house for fear he might hurt him in the rescue. Stephen is not afraid of the

consequences and in his case they are death. You might bear this in mind for often the consequences are more painful for the teacher than the listener. If anything should urge the speaker to caution it is the consequences of his own life, not the effect on his hearers! But Stephen does not fear so he presses on.

Stephen also remains calm throughout and this is perhaps most provocative in debates. *Act 6:15 And all that sat in the council, looking stedfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel.* A man confident in his own ability is not frustrated and angry in himself. He is skilled and fluent. The only way that these wicked people could discredit Stephen was by resorting to conspiracy and false witness. *Act 6:11 Then they suborned men, which said, We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses, and against God. Act 6:13 And set up false witnesses, which said, This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law.*

I know that one should not meditate on what one would say if one is put in this situation, but what would you say if you were in the situation of having one last witness? *Luk 21:12 But before all these, they shall lay their hands on you, and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues, and into prisons, being brought before kings and rulers for my name's sake. Luk 21:13 And it shall turn to you for a testimony. Luk 21:14 Settle it therefore in your hearts, not to meditate before what ye shall answer: Luk 21:15 For I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay nor resist.*

Persecution is an unlikely honour.

Php 1:27 Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel; Php 1:28 And in nothing terrified by your adversaries: which is to them an evident token of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that of God. Php 1:29 For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake; Php 1:30 Having the same conflict which ye saw in me, and now hear to be in me.

Persecution begins in earnest with Stephen, previously the disciples were let off with a warning and a beating.

Those from Cilicia. The mention of Cilicia suggests this may have been Paul's synagogue before he was converted. He came from Tarsus in Cilicia. *Act 21:39 But Paul said, I am a man which am a Jew of Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, a citizen of no mean city: and, I beseech thee, suffer me to speak unto the people.*

Stephens Speech

In Chapter Seven we come to the content of Stephen's speech. We will read the speech in its entirety to keep it whole.

Act 7:1 Then said the high priest, Are these things so? Act 7:2 And he said, Men, brethren, and fathers, hearken; The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Charran, Act 7:3 And said unto him, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and come into the land which I shall shew thee. Act 7:4 Then came he out of the land of the Chaldaeans, and dwelt in Charran: and from thence, when his father was dead, he removed him into this land, wherein ye now dwell. Act 7:5 And he gave him none inheritance in it, no, not so much as to set his foot on: yet he promised that he would give it to him for a possession, and to his seed after him, when as yet he had no child. Act 7:6 And God spake on this wise, That his seed should sojourn in a strange land; and that they should bring them into bondage, and entreat them evil four hundred years. Act 7:7 And the nation to whom they shall be in bondage will I judge, said God: and after that shall they come forth, and serve me in this place. Act 7:8 And he gave him the covenant of circumcision: and so Abraham begat Isaac, and circumcised him the eighth day; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat the twelve patriarchs. Act 7:9 And the patriarchs, moved with envy, sold Joseph into Egypt: but God was with him, Act 7:10 And delivered him out of all his afflictions, and gave him favour and wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh king of Egypt; and he made him governor over Egypt and all his house. Act 7:11 Now there came a dearth over all the land of Egypt and Chanaan, and great affliction: and our fathers found no sustenance. Act 7:12 But when Jacob heard that there was corn in Egypt, he sent out our fathers first. Act 7:13 And at the second time Joseph was made known to his brethren; and Joseph's kindred was made known unto Pharaoh. Act 7:14 Then sent Joseph, and called his father Jacob to him, and all his kindred, threescore and fifteen souls. Act 7:15 So Jacob went down into Egypt, and died, he, and our fathers, Act 7:16 And were carried over into Sychem, and laid in the sepulchre that Abraham bought for a sum of money of the sons of Emmor the father of Sychem. Act 7:17 But when the time of the promise drew nigh, which God had sworn to Abraham, the people grew and multiplied in Egypt, Act 7:18 Till another king arose, which knew not Joseph. Act 7:19 The same dealt subtilly with our kindred, and evil entreated our fathers, so that they cast out their young children, to the end they might not live. Act 7:20 In which time Moses was born, and was exceeding fair, and nourished up in his father's house three months: Act 7:21 And when he was cast out, Pharaoh's daughter took him up, and nourished him for her own son. Act 7:22 And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and in deeds. Act 7:23 And when he was full forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren the children of Israel. Act 7:24 And seeing one of them suffer wrong, he defended him, and avenged him that was oppressed, and smote the Egyptian: Act 7:25 For he supposed his brethren would have understood how that God by his hand would deliver them: but they understood not. Act 7:26 And the next day he shewed himself unto them as they strove, and would have set them at one again, saying, Sirs, ye are brethren; why do ye wrong one to another? Act 7:27 But he that did his neighbour wrong thrust him away, saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge over us? Act 7:28 Wilt thou kill me, as thou diddest the Egyptian yesterday? Act 7:29 Then fled Moses at this saying, and was a stranger in the land of Madian, where he begat two sons. Act 7:30 And when forty years were expired, there appeared to him in the wilderness of mount Sina an angel of the Lord in a flame of fire in a bush. Act 7:31 When Moses saw it, he wondered at the sight: and as he drew near to behold it, the voice of the Lord came unto him, Act 7:32 Saying, I am the God of thy fathers, the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. Then Moses trembled, and durst not behold. Act 7:33 Then said the Lord to him, Put off thy shoes from thy feet: for the place

where thou standest is holy ground. Act 7:34 I have seen, I have seen the affliction of my people which is in Egypt, and I have heard their groaning, and am come down to deliver them. And now come, I will send thee into Egypt. Act 7:35 This Moses whom they refused, saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge? the same did God send to be a ruler and a deliverer by the hand of the angel which appeared to him in the bush. Act 7:36 He brought them out, after that he had shewed wonders and signs in the land of Egypt, and in the Red sea, and in the wilderness forty years. Act 7:37 This is that Moses, which said unto the children of Israel, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear. Act 7:38 This is he, that was in the church in the wilderness with the angel which spake to him in the mount Sina, and with our fathers: who received the lively oracles to give unto us: Act 7:39 To whom our fathers would not obey, but thrust him from them, and in their hearts turned back again into Egypt, Act 7:40 Saying unto Aaron, Make us gods to go before us: for as for this Moses, which brought us out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him. Act 7:41 And they made a calf in those days, and offered sacrifice unto the idol, and rejoiced in the works of their own hands. Act 7:42 Then God turned, and gave them up to worship the host of heaven; as it is written in the book of the prophets, O ye house of Israel, have ye offered to me slain beasts and sacrifices by the space of forty years in the wilderness? Act 7:43 Yea, ye took up the tabernacle of Moloch, and the star of your god Remphan, figures which ye made to worship them: and I will carry you away beyond Babylon. Act 7:44 Our fathers had the tabernacle of witness in the wilderness, as he had appointed, speaking unto Moses, that he should make it according to the fashion that he had seen. Act 7:45 Which also our fathers that came after brought in with Jesus into the possession of the Gentiles, whom God drave out before the face of our fathers, unto the days of David; Act 7:46 Who found favour before God, and desired to find a tabernacle for the God of Jacob. Act 7:47 But Solomon built him an house. Act 7:48 Howbeit the most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands; as saith the prophet, Act 7:49 Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool: what house will ye build me? saith the Lord: or what is the place of my rest? Act 7:50 Hath not my hand made all these things? Act 7:51 Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye. Act 7:52 Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers: Act 7:53 Who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it.

Stephen's speech is not so much a forensic defence as a statement of the teaching that had caused so much irritation. This teaching marks a great advance on the more conservative Jerusalem Christianity of the previous chapters and in several ways foreshadows the teaching of Paul and of the Epistle to the Hebrews.

The main arguments are:

- God is not locally restricted and does not inhabit material buildings. His people also should not be tied to any particular spot.
- The Jewish Nation has always been rebellious as previous generations opposed the prophets from Moses onwards so this generation has killed the Righteous One.

We can break this speech down into aspects:

- 1) Stephen has a grasp of Old Testament scriptures. It is as a living picture before his eyes, not a trace of dryness or dust of neglect is seen.
- 2) The speech is intricate with numerous themes running through it, a history of redemption.
 - a. The rejection of the patriarchs as a typical national behaviour. In the present (then) generation they continued and rejected Christ the Saviour. *Act 7:9 And the patriarchs, moved with envy, sold Joseph into Egypt: but God was with him. Act 7:27 But he that did his neighbour wrong thrust him away, saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge over us? Act 7:35 This Moses whom they refused, saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge? the same did God send to be a ruler and a deliverer by the hand of the angel which appeared to him in the bush. Act 7:39 To whom our fathers would not obey, but thrust him from them, and in their hearts turned back again into Egypt.*
 - b. The theme of deliverance into a land of God's. Ultimately a spiritual realm. *Act 7:3 And said unto him, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and come into the land which I shall shew thee. Act 7:10 And delivered him out of all his afflictions, and gave him favour and wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh king of Egypt; and he made him governor over Egypt and all his house. Act 7:14 Then sent Joseph, and called his father Jacob to him, and all his kindred, threescore and fifteen souls. Act 7:25 For he supposed his brethren would have understood how that God by his hand would deliver them: but they understood not. Act 7:34 I have seen, I have seen the affliction of my people which is in Egypt, and I have heard their groaning, and am come down to deliver them. And now come, I will send thee into Egypt. Act 7:36 He brought them out, after that he had shewed wonders and signs in the land of Egypt, and in the Red sea, and in the wilderness forty years.*
 - c. The development of the Covenant. *Act 7:8 And he gave him the covenant of circumcision: and so Abraham begat Isaac, and circumcised him the eighth day; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat the twelve patriarchs.*
 - d. The typical prophet (Messianic of the Old Testament church. This Jesus was to be expected. History demanded it. *Act 7:37 This is that Moses, which said unto the children of Israel, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear. Act 7:38 This is he, that was in the church in the wilderness with the angel which spake to him in the mount Sina, and with our fathers: who received the lively oracles to give unto us: Act 7:52 Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers. Joh 1:21 And they asked him, What then? Art thou Elias? And he saith, I am not. Art thou that prophet? And he answered, No. Joh 6:14 Then those men, when they had seen the miracle that Jesus did, said, This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world. Joh 7:41 Others said, This is the Christ. But some said, Shall Christ come out of Galilee?*
 - e. The typical kingdom, a land promised but not The Kingdom or The Land. *Act 7:5 And he gave him none inheritance in it, no, not so*

much as to set his foot on: yet he promised that he would give it to him for a possession, and to his seed after him, when as yet he had no child.

The thrust of all these ideas leads to one overwhelming conclusion which Stephen draws. The history of Israel was one of continual unbelief, disobedience, rejection and brutality against those who bore the truth of God!

Of Whom the World Was Not Worthy

Stephen's theme is relevant to the charge that he speaks against the law (i.e. Moses). He spoke for it and proves the case against his accusers. He is uncompromising in the face of opposition even though that opposition could use violence against him. He does not mitigate his enthusiasm even though it is greatly distressing his hearers. He is wholly Biblical and relevant. This is the "stuff" of faith.

Then they secretly induced men to say, "We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God." And they stirred up the people, the elders, and the scribes, and they came upon him, seized him, and brought him to the council. They also set up false witnesses who said, "This man does not cease to speak blasphemous words against this holy place and the law; for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs which Moses delivered to us."

- They secretly induced men to say. The opponents of Stephen could not win a fair fight, so they used lies and secret strategies to shape popular opinion against Stephen.

Normally, Luke would not know what the opponents of Stephen secretly induced men to say. Possibly he knew it because a man named Saul of Tarsus was among the opponents. Some of them were from Paul's home region of Cilicia. Saul (who became known as Paul the apostle) may have told Luke about this incident.

- They stirred up the people: The opponents of Stephen could do nothing against the followers of Jesus until they got popular opinion on their side. Previously, persecution against the apostles had been limited because popular opinion was with them (Acts 2:47, 5:26).

Popular opinion can be easily shaped. The same crowds that praised Jesus (Luke 19:35-40) soon called for His crucifixion (Luke 23:18-23). The crowds that loved the apostles (Acts 2:47, 5:26) cry out against Stephen. This is why we should never let popular opinion shape the vision or focus of the church, but let it rest on God's eternal Word.

- We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God. This man does not cease to speak blasphemous words against this holy

place and the law Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs.

These were the accusations against Stephen. Significantly, many of the same false accusations were levelled against Jesus (Matthew 26:59-61). It is a good thing to be accused of the same things Jesus was accused of.

They accused him of these things because Stephen clearly taught that:

- Jesus was greater than Moses (blasphemous words against Moses).
- Jesus was God (blasphemous words against...God).
- Jesus was greater than the temple (blasphemous words against this holy place).
- Jesus was the fulfilment of the law (blasphemous words against...the law).
- Jesus was greater than their religious customs and traditions (Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs).

Of course, Stephen never taught against Moses and God, but his glorification of Jesus was twisted by the accusers. Stephen never spoke blasphemous words against this holy place (the temple), but he would not make it an idol as many Jewish people in that day did. Stephen had his words twisted and false accusations were brought against him.

“Whatever form of words Stephen used which gave rise to the accusation that he said Jesus would destroy the temple, he certainly grasped and expounded the inner meaning of Jesus’ own words.” (Bruce).

Several commentators imply or directly state that the thrust of Stephen’s message, that Jesus supersedes the temple and its localised worship, was a doctrine that the apostles themselves must have shied away from proclaiming. This is unwarranted speculation. The demonstrated boldness of the apostles is undeniable proof that they withheld no truth from fear that it might be too controversial or dangerous.

Faith in practice is perhaps Stephen’s speech to the righteous. It does not highlight the shortcomings of unbelief but focuses upon the brightness of faith. *Heb 11:32 And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gedeon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthae; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets: Heb 11:33 Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, Heb 11:34 Quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens.* Men who never gave up despite overwhelming odds!

The Stoning of Stephen

Act 7:54 When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth. Act 7:55 But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God, Act 7:56 And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened,

and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God. Act 7:57 Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord, Act 7:58 And cast him out of the city, and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul. Act 7:59 And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. Act 7:60 And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

It seems Gamaliel's advice has been forgotten or is deliberately disregarded.

Stephen's death like those of other saints is an act of God. *Heb 11:36 And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: Heb 11:37 They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; Heb 11:38 (Of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. Heb 11:39 And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: Heb 11:40 God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect.*

We are even privileged to see through Stephen's eyes the Lord Jesus standing over this scene. Yet Jesus does not lift a finger to alter the course of events. *Act 7:55 But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God.* Here is proof that God allows tragedy to strike His own. In answer to why does God allow suffering we have here no answer except that He does.

No one reasons with Stephen!

He proved the truth of the gospel, by working miracles in Christ's name.

He was full of faith and power, that is, of a strong faith, by which he was enabled to do great things. Those that are full of faith are full of power, because by faith the power of God is engaged for us. His faith did so fill him that it left no room for unbelief and made room for the influences of divine grace, so that, as the prophet speaks, he was full of power by the Spirit of the Lord of hosts, Mic. 3:8. By faith we are emptied of self, and so are filled with Christ, who is the wisdom of God and the power of God.

Being so he did great wonders and miracles among the people, openly, and in the sight of all, for Christ's miracles feared not the strictest scrutiny. It is not strange that Stephen, though he was not a preacher by office to our knowledge, did these great wonders, for we find that these were distinct gifts of the Spirit, and divided severally, for to one was given the working of miracles, and to another prophecy. [1 Cor. 12:10, 11](#). *And these signs followed not only those that preached, but those that believed.* Mark 16:17.

He pleaded the cause of Christianity against those that opposed it, and argued against it ([Acts 6:9, 10](#)); he served the interests of religion as a disputant, in the high places of the field, while others were serving them as vinedressers and husbandmen.

We are told who his opponents were. (Acts 6:9) They were Jews, but Hellenist Jews, Jews of the dispersion, who seem to have been more zealous for their religion than the native Jews, it was with difficulty that they retained the practice and profession of it in the country where they lived, where they were as speckled birds, and not without great expense and toil that they kept up their attendance at Jerusalem, and this made them more active sticklers for Judaism than those were whose profession of their religion was cheap and easy.

They were of the synagogue which is called the synagogue of the Libertines, the Romans called those Liberti, or Libertini, who either, being foreigners, were naturalised, or, being slaves by birth, were manumitted, or made freemen or even those simply born free. Some think that these Libertines were such of the Jews as had obtained the Roman freedom, as the Chief Captain speaking to Paul had ([Acts 22:27, 28](#)); and it is probable that he was the most forward man of this synagogue of the Libertines in disputing with Stephen, and engaged others in the dispute, for we find him busy in the stoning of Stephen, and consenting to his death.

There were others who belonged to the synagogue of the Cyrenians and Alexandrians, of which synagogue the Jewish writers speak; and others that belonged to their synagogue who were of Cilicia and Asia, and if Paul, as a freeman of Rome, did not belong to the synagogue of the Libertines, he belonged to this, as a native of Tarsus, a city of Cilicia, it is probable that he might be a member of both.

The Jews that were born in other countries, and had concerns in them, had frequent occasion, not only to resort to, but to reside in, Jerusalem. Each nation had its synagogue, as in London there are French, and Dutch, and Danish churches and those synagogues were the schools to which the Jews of those nations sent their youth to be educated in the Jewish learning. Now those that were tutors and professors in these synagogues, seeing the gospel grow, and the rulers conniving at the growth of it, and fearing what would be the consequence of it to the Jewish religion, which they were jealous for, being confident of the goodness of their cause, and their own sufficiency to manage it, would undertake to run down Christianity by force of argument. It was a fair and rational way of dealing with it, and what religion is always ready to admit. *Produce your cause, saith the Lord, bring forth your strong reasons*, Isa. 41:21.

But why did they dispute with Stephen and why not with the apostles themselves?

Some think because they despised the apostles as unlearned and ignorant men, whom they thought it below them to engage with, but Stephen was bred a scholar, and they thought it their honour to meddle with their match.

Others think it was because they stood in awe of the apostles, and could not be so free and familiar with them as they could be with Stephen, who was in an inferior office.

Perhaps, they having given a public challenge, Stephen was chosen and appointed by the disciples to be their champion, for it was not meet that the apostles should leave the preaching of the word of God to engage in controversy.

Stephen's death sparks some lasting changes for our friends.

Saul Ravages the Church

Act 8:1 And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles. Act 8:2 And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him. Act 8:3 As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison.

After the wonderful Stephen, Saul steps forward. Luke uses a good example followed by a bad one as a literary device, as he did with Barnabas and then Ananias and Sapphira.

Whilst Stephen's funeral is taking place, Saul violates the Christians.

We see that Paul was present among those who were cut to the heart at hearing these things and we are often unaware of our witness. *Act 7:54 When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth.* He is kicking against God's goads. This was perhaps the start of the turmoil that led him to the confrontation on the Damascus road.

Persecution spreads the Gospel.

Stephen's death is the signal for the persecution and scattering of the local church at Jerusalem. *Act 8:1 And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles. Act 8:2 And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him.* It should teach us to rejoice in the times that we have to spend together for they may not last.

For these early brethren they suffered persecution from Jews long before the Romans made it a sport. *Act 8:3 As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison.* It shows how wicked the human heart is when it uses violence against people who were in all probability the most model citizens you could ever wish for. Malice does not respect goodness!

It feels like everything has changed radically just a few weeks after the ascension of Jesus, but in reality this is the same old persecution Jesus faced, but without Jesus to act as a focal point and buffer them, the Christians take the full force of it.

What was the effect of this persecution? They were all scattered abroad, not all the believers, but all the preachers, who were principally struck at, and against whom warrants were issued out to take them up.

They, remembering our Master's rule (when they persecute you in one city, flee to another), dispersed themselves by agreement throughout the regions of Judea and of Samaria, not so much for fear of sufferings (for Judea and Samaria were not so far off from Jerusalem but that, if they made a public appearance there, as they determined to do, their persecutors' power would soon reach them there), but because they looked upon this as an intimation of providence to them to scatter.

Their work was pretty well done in Jerusalem, and now it was time to think of the necessities of other places, for their Master had told them that they must be his witnesses in Jerusalem first, and then in all Judea and in Samaria, and then to the uttermost part of the earth (Acts 1:8), and this method they observe. Though persecution may not drive us off from our work, yet it may send us, as a hint of providence, to work elsewhere.

Note the end of the sentence holds an exclusion to this, except the apostles. Why was this?

The preachers were all scattered except the apostles, who, probably, were directed by the Spirit to continue at Jerusalem yet for some time, they being, by the special providence of God, screened from the storm, and by the special grace of God enabled to face the storm. They tarried at Jerusalem, that they might be ready to go where their assistance was most needed by the other preachers that were sent to break the ice, as Christ ordered His disciples to go to those places where He Himself designed to go, Luke 10:1.

I see a defiance and fearlessness in this action and perhaps a care for the newly formed churches still in need of support.

The apostles continued longer together at Jerusalem than one would have thought, considering the command and commission given them, to go into all the world, and to disciple all nations. But what was done by the evangelists whom they sent forth was reckoned as done by them.

They did not keep together in a body, though this might have been a strength to them, but they scattered into all parts, not to take their ease, but to find work. They went evangelising the world, preaching the word of the gospel, it was this which filled them, and which they endeavoured to fill the country with, those of them that were preachers in their preaching, and others in their common conversations. They were now in a country where they were not strangers, for Christ and His disciples had conversed much in the regions of Judea, so that they had a foundation laid there for them to build upon, and it would be requisite to let the people there know what that doctrine which Jesus had preached there some time ago was come to, and that it was not lost and forgotten, as perhaps they were made to believe.

We now move on to focus on another of the seven deacons, note that he also preaches and performs miracles.

Philip Proclaims Christ in Samaria

Act 8:4 Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word. Act 8:5 Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them. Act 8:6 And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. Act 8:7 For unclean spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed with them: and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed. Act 8:8 And there was great joy in that city.

Our mission has now finally expanded to Samaria, more specifically the city of Samaria.



In the 9th and the 8th centuries BCE, Samaria was the capital of the northern Kingdom of Israel. This was the lands of the tribes of Ephraim and Manassah.

A massive royal acropolis was built on the site during the late Iron Age II, including a casemate wall and a palatial complex considered one of the largest Iron Age structures in the Levant

According to the Bible, Omri, the king of the northern kingdom of Israel, purchased the hill from its owner, Shemer, for two talents of silver, and built on its broad summit a city he named Šōmrōn (Shomron; later it became 'Samaria' in Greek), the new city replaced Tirzah as the capital of his kingdom. As such it

possessed many advantages. Omri resided here during the last six years of his reign.

1Ki 16:23 In the thirty and first year of Asa king of Judah began Omri to reign over Israel, twelve years: six years reigned he in Tirzah. 1Ki 16:24 And he bought the hill Samaria of Shemer for two talents of silver, and built on the hill, and called the name of the city which he built, after the name of Shemer, owner of the hill, Samaria.

We shall hear soon of the progress and success of others who were scattered (Acts 11:19), but here we view the motions of Philip, not Philip the apostle, but Philip the deacon, who was chosen to serve tables. *1Ti 3:13 For they that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.*

Stephen was advanced to the degree of a martyr, Philip to the degree of an evangelist, which when he entered upon, being obliged by it to give himself to the word and prayer, he was, no doubt, discharged from the office of a deacon, for how could he serve tables at Jerusalem, which by that office he was obliged to do, when he was preaching in Samaria? It is possible that two others were chosen for the deacon roles of Stephen and Philip.

What a wonderful success Philip had in his preaching, and what a reception he met with!

The place he chose was the city of Samaria, the head city of Samaria, the metropolis of that country. The Jews would have no dealings with the Samaritans, but Jesus sent his gospel to slay all enmities, and particularly that between the Jews and the Samaritans, by making them one in His church.

The doctrine he preached was Christ, for he determined to know nothing else. He preached Christ to them, he proclaimed Christ to them (so the word signifies), just as a king, when he comes to the crown, is proclaimed throughout his dominions.

The Samaritans had an expectation of the Messiah's coming. *Joh 4:25 The woman saith unto him, I know that Messias cometh, which is called Christ: when he is come, he will tell us all things.* Now Philip tells them that He is come, and that the Samaritans are welcome to partake of Him. A ministers' business is to preach Christ and Him crucified and glorified.

It is noted that a substantial number of Samaritans accepted Jesus through the Samaritan woman at the wells testimony to them, and Jesus stayed in Samaria for two days before returning to Cana. *Joh 4:39 And many of the Samaritans of that city believed on him for the saying of the woman, which testified, He told me all that ever I did. Joh 4:40 So when the Samaritans were come unto him, they besought him that he would tarry with them: and he abode there two days. Joh 4:41 And many more believed because of his own word; Joh 4:42 And said unto the woman, Now we believe, not because of thy saying: for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world.*

It is only the Samaritan who helped the man stripped of clothing, beaten, and left on the road half dead. The priest and Levite walked past. But the Samaritan helped the naked man regardless of his nakedness (itself religiously offensive to the priest and Levite), his self-evident poverty, or to which Hebrew sect he belonged.

The proofs Philip produced for the confirmation of his doctrine were miracles. To convince them that he had his commission from heaven (and therefore not only they might venture upon what he said, but they were bound to yield to it), he shows them this broad seal of heaven annexed to it, which the God of truth would never put to a lie. The miracles were undeniable, they heard of and saw the miracles which he did. They heard the commanding words he spoke, and saw the amazing effects of them immediately, that he spoke, and it was done. And the nature of the miracles was such as suited the intention of his commission, and gave light and lustre to it.

It seems in the book of Acts many confirmations by miracles happen. Peter, Stephen, Phillip, Paul and more, which begs the question why don't we have this same confirmation now in our lives and witness or are we missing something?

The acceptance which Philip's doctrine met with in Samaria is exciting. The people with one accord gave heed to those things which Philip spoke, induced by the miracles which served at first to gain attention, and so by degrees to gain assent. There then begin to be some hopes of people when they begin to take notice of what is said to them concerning the things of their souls and eternity, when they begin to give heed to the word of God, as those that are well pleased to hear it, desirous to understand and remember it, and that look upon themselves as concerned in it. The common people gave heed to Philip, a multitude of them, not here one and there one, but with one accord, they were all of a mind, that it was fit the doctrine of the gospel should be enquired into, and an impartial hearing given to it.

The satisfaction they had in attending on, and listening to, Philip's preaching, and the success it had with many of them is mentioned. There was great joy in that city, for they believed Philip. Philip preached the things concerning the kingdom of God, the constitution of that kingdom, the laws and ordinances of it, the liberties and privileges of it and the obligations we are all under to be the loyal subjects of that kingdom and he preached the name of Jesus Christ, as King of that kingdom.

What was there in particular at this city of Samaria that made the success of the gospel there more than ordinarily wonderful? If only we knew the secret, we may yet find out.

It seems like the perfect evangelistic trip. Phillip goes, delivers his message and en-mass people believe.

And there was great joy in that city.

Simon the Magician Believes

Act 8:9 But there was a certain man, called Simon, which beforetime in the same city used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one: Act 8:10 To whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God. Act 8:11 And to him they had regard, because that of long time he had bewitched them with sorceries. Act 8:12 But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptised, both men and women. Act 8:13 Then Simon himself believed also: and when he was baptised, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done. Act 8:14 Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John: Act 8:15 Who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost: Act 8:16 (For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptised in the name of the Lord Jesus.) Act 8:17 Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost. Act 8:18 And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, Act 8:19 Saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost. Act 8:20 But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. Act 8:21 Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God. Act 8:22 Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee. Act 8:23 For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity. Act 8:24 Then answered Simon, and said, Pray ye to the Lord for me, that none of these things which ye have spoken come upon me. Act 8:25 And they, when they had testified and preached the word of the Lord, returned to Jerusalem, and preached the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans.

We asked what there was in particular at this city of Samaria that made the success of the gospel there more than ordinarily wonderful.

Simon Magus had been busy there, and had gained a great following among the people, and yet they believed the things that Philip spoke. To unlearn that which is bad proves many times a harder task than to learn that which is good. These Samaritans, though they were not idolaters as the Gentiles, nor prejudiced against the gospel by traditions received from their fathers, yet had of late been drawn to follow Simon, a conjurer (for so Magus signifies) who made a mighty noise among them, and had strangely bewitched them.

We see how strong the delusion of Satan was by which they were brought into the web of this great deceiver. He had been for some time, for a long time, in this city, using sorceries, perhaps he came there by the instigation of the devil, soon after our Saviour had been there, to undo what he had been doing there, for it was always Satan's way to crush a good work in its bud and infancy.

First, Simon assumed to himself that which was considerable. He gave out that he himself was some great one, and would have all people to believe so and to pay him respect accordingly; and then, as to everything else, they might do as they pleased. He had no intention to reform their lives, nor improve their worship and devotion, only to make them believe that he was some divine person. Pride,

ambition, and an affectation of grandeur, have always been the cause of abundance of mischief both to the world and to the church.

Secondly, the people ascribed to him what he pleased. They all gave heed to him, from the least to the greatest, both young and old, both poor and rich, both governors and governed. To him they had regard and perhaps the more because the time fixed for the coming of the Messiah had raised a general expectation of the appearing of some great one about this time. Probably he was a native of their country, and therefore they embraced him the more cheerfully, that by giving honour to him they might reflect it upon themselves.

The people said of him, this man is the great power of God, that great power (so it might be read), that power which made the world. See how ignorant inconsiderate people mistake that which is done by the power of Satan, as if it were done by the power of God. Thus, in the Gentile world, devils pass for deities, and in the antichristian kingdom all the world wonders after a beast, to whom the dragon gives his power, and who opens his mouth in blasphemy against God, Rev. 13:2-5. They were brought to it by his sorceries, he bewitched the people of Samaria, bewitched them with sorceries, that is, either, by his magic arts he bewitched the minds of the people, at least some of them, who drew in others. Satan, by God's permission, filled their hearts to follow Simon. O foolish Galatians, saith Paul, who hath bewitched you? Gal. 3:1.

These people are said to be bewitched by Simon, because they were so strangely infatuated to believe a lie. By his magic arts he did many signs and lying wonders, which seemed to be miracles, but really were not so, like those of the magicians of Egypt, and those of the man of sin, 2 Thess. 2:9. When they knew no better, they were influenced by his sorceries, but, when they were acquainted with Philip's real miracles, they saw plainly that the one was real and the other a sham, and that there was as much difference as between Aaron's rod and those of the magicians. What is the chaff to the wheat? Jer. 23:28.

Thus, notwithstanding the influence Simon Magus had had upon them, and the unwillingness there generally is in people to own themselves in an error, and to retract it, when they saw the difference between Simon and Philip, they left Simon, gave heed no longer to him, but to Philip and so we see,

- How strong the power of Divine grace is, by which they were brought to Christ, who is truth itself, and was, the great undeceiver. By that grace working with the word those that had been led captive by Satan were brought into obedience to Christ. Where Satan, as a strong man armed, kept possession of the palace, and thought himself safe, Christ, as a stronger than he, dispossessed him, and divided the spoil, led captivity captive, and made those the trophies of His victory whom the devil had triumphed over. Let us not despair of the worst, when even those whom Simon Magus had bewitched were brought to believe.
- Here is another thing yet more wonderful, that Simon Magus himself became a convert to the faith of Christ, in show and profession, for a time. Simon himself believed also. He was convinced that Philip preached a true doctrine, because he saw it confirmed by real miracles, of which he was better able to judge because he was conscious of the tricks of his own pretend ones.

- The present conviction went so far that he was baptised, was admitted, as other believers were, into the church by baptism and we have no reason to think that Philip did amiss in baptising him, no, nor in baptising him quickly. Though he had been a very wicked man, a sorcerer, a pretender to divine honours, yet, upon his solemn profession of repentance for his sin and faith in Jesus Christ, he was baptised. For, as great wickedness before conversion keeps not true penitents from the benefits of God's grace, so neither should it keep professing ones from fellowship. Prodigals, when they return, must be joyfully welcomed home, though we cannot be sure whether they will play the prodigal again. Nay, though he was now but a hypocrite, and really in the gall of bitterness and bond of iniquity all this while, and would soon have been found to be so if he had been tried awhile, yet Philip baptised him, for it is God's prerogative to know the heart. The church and its ministers must go by a judgement of charity, as far as there is room for it.
- The present conviction lasted so long that he continued with Philip. Though afterwards he apostatized from Christianity, yet not quickly. He courted Philip's acquaintance, and now he that had given out himself to be some great one is content to sit at the feet of a preacher of the gospel. Even bad men, very bad, may sometimes be in a good frame, very good, and those whose hearts still go after their covetousness may possibly not only come before God as His people come, but continue with them.
- The present conviction was wrought and kept up by the miracles, he was curious to see himself so far outdone in signs and miracles. Many wonder at the proofs of divine truths who never experience the power of them.

God had wonderfully blessed Philip in his work as an evangelist at Samaria, but he could do no more than an evangelist, there were some peculiar powers reserved to the apostles, for the keeping up of the dignity of their office, and here we have an account of what was done by two of them there, Peter and John. The twelve kept together at Jerusalem, and now these good tidings were brought them that Samaria had received the word of God, that a great harvest of souls was gathered, and was likely to be gathered in to Christ there. I can almost feel their excitement.

The word of God was not only preached to them, but received by them, they bade it welcome, admitted the light of it, and submitted to the power of it. Clearly there is communication with the apostles back in Jerusalem and when they heard it they sent unto them Peter and John. Peter could have gone on his own, but he was so far from this that he submitted to an order of the house and, as a servant to the body, went where they sent him.

Two apostles were sent, the two "most eminent", to Samaria, to encourage Philip, to assist him, and strengthen his hands. Ministers that excel in gifts and graces, should contrive how they may be helpful to others, and contribute to their comfort and usefulness, to carry on the good work that was begun among the people, and, with those heavenly graces that had enriched them, to confer upon them spiritual gifts.

It is said, the Holy Ghost was as yet fallen upon none of them.

We have reason to think that Philip had received these gifts of the Holy Ghost himself, but had not the power to confer them therefore the apostles must come to do this and they did it not necessarily upon all that were baptised, but upon some of them.

Now in order to this, the apostles prayed for them. The Spirit is given in answer to prayer, they laid their hands on them, to signify that their prayers were answered. The laying on of hands was used in blessing, by those who blessed with authority. Thus the apostles blessed these new converts.

Next we see how they discovered and discarded him that was a hypocrite among them, and this was Simon Magus, for they knew how to separate between the precious and the vile.

Now to the wicked proposal that Simon made, by which his hypocrisy was discovered. When he saw that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given (which should have confirmed his faith in the doctrine of Christ, and increased his veneration for the apostles), it gave him a notion of Christianity as no other than an exalted piece of sorcery, in which he thought himself capable of being equal to the apostles, and therefore offered them money, saying, Give me also this power. He does not desire them to lay their hands on him, that he might receive the Holy Ghost himself (for he did not foresee that anything was to be gained by that), but that they would convey to him a power to bestow the gift upon others. He was ambitious to have the honour of an apostle, but not at all solicitous to have the spirit and disposition of a Christian. He was more desirous to gain honour to himself than to do good to others.

Now, in making this motion,

1. He insulted the apostles, as if they were mercenary men, would do anything for money, and loved it as much as he did, whereas they had left what they had, for Christ, so far were they from aiming to make it more.
2. He put a great affront upon Christianity, as if the miracles that were wrought for the proof of it were done by magic arts, only of a different nature from what he himself had practised formerly.
3. He showed that he still had a very high opinion of himself, and that he had never his heart truly humbled. Such a wretch as he had been before his baptism should have asked, like the prodigal, to be made as one of the hired servants. But, as soon as he is admitted into the family, no less a place will serve him than to be one of the stewards of the household, and to be entrusted with a power which Philip himself had not, but the apostles only.

There is a just rejection of his proposal, and a cutting reproof that Peter gave him for it.

Peter shows him his crime, thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money; and thus,

He had overvalued the wealth of this world.

He had undervalued the gift of the Holy Ghost and put it upon a level with the common gifts of nature and providence. He thought the power of an apostle might as well be had for a good fee as the advice of a physician or a lawyer, which was the greatest insult that could be done to the Spirit of grace. All the buying and selling of pardons and indulgences in the church of Rome is the product of this same wicked thought, that the gift of God may be purchased with money, when the offer of divine grace so expressly runs, without money and without price.

He shows his character, which is inferred from his crime. From everything that a man says or does wrong we cannot infer that he is a hypocrite in the profession he makes of religion, but this of Simon's was such a fundamental error as could by no means consist with a state of grace, his offering money (and that got by sorcery too) was an incontestable evidence that he was still under the power of a worldly and carnal mind, and was yet that natural man which receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, neither can he know them.

And therefore Peter tells him plainly,

That his heart was not right in the sight of God. We are as our hearts are, if they are not right, we are wrong and they are open in the sight of God, who knows them, judges them, and judges of us by them. Our hearts are in the sight of God, who cannot be deceived, and if they are not right in his sight, whatever our pretensions be, our religion is vain, and will stand us in no stead, our great concern is to prove ourselves to Him in our integrity, for otherwise we cheat ourselves into our own ruin. Some refer this particularly to the proposal he made, what he asked is denied him, because his heart is not right in the sight of God in asking it. He does not aim at the glory of God nor the honour of Christ in it, but to make a hand of it for himself, he asks, and has not, because he asks amiss, that he may consume it upon his lusts, and be still thought some great one.

Simon is in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity, I perceive that thou art so. This is plain speaking, and plain speaking is best when we are dealing about souls and eternity. Simon had got a great name among the people, and of late a good name too among God's people, and yet Peter here gives him a black character. Note, It is possible for a man to continue under the power of sin, and yet to put on a form of godliness. I perceive it, saith Peter. It was not so much by the spirit of discerning, with which Peter was endued, that he perceived this, as by Simon's discovery of it in the proposal he made. The disguises of hypocrites are soon seen through, the nature of the wolf shows itself in spite of the cover of the sheep's clothing.

Now the character shown of Simon is really the character of all wicked people. First, they are in the gall of bitterness, odious to God, as that which is bitter as gall is to us. Sin is an abominable thing, which the Lord hates, and sinners are by it made abominable to Him, they are vicious in their own nature. Indwelling sin is a root of bitterness, that bears gall and wormwood, Deut 29:18. The faculties are corrupted, and the mind embittered against all good, Heb 12:15. It intimates likewise the pernicious consequences of sin, the end is bitter as wormwood. Secondly, they are in the bond of iniquity, bound over to the judgement of God by the guilt of sin, and bound under the dominion of Satan by the power of sin, led captive by him at his will, and it is a sore bondage, like that in Egypt, making the life bitter.

Peter reads him his doom in two things.

He shall sink with his worldly wealth, which he overvalued, thy money perish with thee. First, Peter rejects his offer with the utmost disdain and indignation, "Dost thou think thou canst bribe us to betray our trust, and to put the power we are entrusted with into such unworthy hands? Away with thee and thy money too, we will have nothing to do with either. Get thee behind me, Satan." When we are tempted with money to do an evil thing, we should see what a perishing thing money is, and scorn to be biased by it. It is the character of the upright man that he shakes his hands from holding, from touching bribes. *Isa 33:15 He that walketh righteously, and speaketh uprightly; he that despiseth the gain of oppressions, that shaketh his hands from holding of bribes, that stoppeth his ears from hearing of blood, and shutteth his eyes from seeing evil;*

Secondly, He warns him of his danger of utter destruction if he continued in this mind, "Thy money will perish and thou wilt lose it, and all that thou canst purchase with it. As meats for the belly and the belly for meats (1 Cor. 6:13), so goods for money and money for goods, but God shall destroy both it and them, they perish in the using, but this is not the worst of it: thou wilt perish with it, and it with thee, and it will be an aggravation of thy ruin, and a heavy load upon thy perishing soul, that thou hadst money, which might have been made to turn to a good account, which might have been laid at the apostles' feet, as a charity, and would have been accepted, but was thrust into their hands as a bribe, and was rejected.

He shall come short of the spiritual blessings which he undervalued, "Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter; thou hast nothing to do with the gifts of the Holy Ghost, thou dost not understand them, thou art excluded from them, hast put a bar in thine own door, thou canst not receive the Holy Ghost thyself, nor power to confer the Holy Ghost upon others, for thy heart is not right in the sight of God, if thou thinkest that Christianity is a trade to live by in this world, and therefore thou hast no part nor lot in the eternal life in the other world which the gospel offers." Note, First, There are many who profess the Christian religion, and yet have no part nor lot in the matter, no part in Christ (John 13:8), no lot in the heavenly Canaan. Secondly, They are those whose hearts are not right in the sight of God, are not animated by a right spirit, nor guided by a right rule, nor directed to the right end.

Peter gives him good counsel, notwithstanding. Though he was angry with him, yet he did not abandon him; and, though he would have him see his case to be very bad, yet he would not have him think it desperate.

What is it that he advises him to do?

First, He must repent, must see his error and retract it, must change his mind and ways, and must be humbled and ashamed for what he has done. His repentance must be particular, "Repent of this, own thyself guilty in this, and be sorry for it." He must lay a load upon himself for it, must not extenuate it, by calling it a mistake, or misguided zeal, but must aggravate it by calling it wickedness, his wickedness, the fruit of his own corruption. Those that have said and done amiss must, as far as they can, unsay it and undo it again by repentance.

Secondly, He must pray to God, must pray that God would give him repentance, and pardon upon repentance. Penitents must pray, which implies a desire towards God, and a confidence in Christ. Simon Magus, as great a man as he thinks himself, shall not be courted into the apostles' communion, upon any other terms than those upon which other sinners are admitted, repentance and prayer.

What encouragement Peter gives him to do this. If perhaps the thought of thy heart, this wicked thought of thine, may be forgiven thee.

There may be a great deal of wickedness in the thought of the heart, its false notions, and corrupt affections, and wicked projects, which must be repented of, or we are undone.

The thought of the heart, though ever so wicked, shall be forgiven, upon our repentance, and not laid to our charge. When Peter here puts a perhaps upon it, the doubt is of the sincerity of his repentance, not of his pardon if his repentance be sincere. If indeed the thought of thy heart may be forgiven, so it may be read.

Simon requests to them to pray for him. He was startled and put into confusion by that which Peter said, finding that resented thus which he thought would have been embraced with both arms; and he cries out, Pray you to the Lord for me, that none of the things which you have spoken come upon me.

He was affected with the reproof given him, and terrified by the character given of him, enough to make the stoutest heart tremble, and, this being so he begged the prayers of the apostles for him, wishing to have an interest in them, who, he believed, had a good interest in heaven.

He begged of them to pray for him, but did not pray for himself, as he ought to have done, and, in desiring them to pray for him, his concern is more that the judgements he had made himself liable to might be prevented than that his corruptions might be mortified, and his heart, by divine grace, be made right in the sight of God; like Pharaoh, who would have Moses entreat the Lord for him, that he would take away this death only, not that he would take away this sin, this hardness of heart, [Exod. 8:8](#); [10:17](#).

Then there is the return of the apostles to Jerusalem, when they had finished the business they came about; for as yet they were not to disperse, but, though they came hither to do that work which was peculiar to them as apostles, yet, opportunity offering itself, they applied themselves to that which was common to all gospel ministers.

There, in the city of Samaria, they were preachers, they testified the word of the Lord, solemnly attested the truth of the gospel, and confirmed what the other ministers preached. They did not pretend to bring them anything new, though they were apostles, but bore their testimony to the word of the Lord as they had received it.

On their road home they were itinerant preachers, as they passed through many villages of the Samaritans they preached the gospel. Though the congregations there were not as considerable as those in the cities in numbers, yet their souls

were as precious, and the apostles did not think it below them to preach the gospel to them.

Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch Part 1

Act 8:26 And the angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying, Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert. Act 8:27 And he arose and went: and, behold, a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem for to worship, Act 8:28 Was returning, and sitting in his chariot read Esaias the prophet. Act 8:29 Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot. Act 8:30 And Philip ran thither to him, and heard him read the prophet Esaias, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest? Act 8:31 And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me? And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him. Act 8:32 The place of the scripture which he read was this, He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened he not his mouth: Act 8:33 In his humiliation his judgement was taken away: and who shall declare his generation? for his life is taken from the earth. Act 8:34 And the eunuch answered Philip, and said, I pray thee, of whom speaketh the prophet this? of himself, or of some other man? Act 8:35 Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus. Act 8:36 And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptised? Act 8:37 And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. Act 8:38 And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptised him. Act 8:39 And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing. Act 8:40 But Philip was found at Azotus: and passing through he preached in all the cities, till he came to Caesarea.

We have here the story of the conversion of an Ethiopian eunuch to the faith of Christ, by whom, we have reason to believe, the knowledge of Christ was sent into that country where he lived, and that scripture was fulfilled, *Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God* (one of the first of the nations) , Ps 68:31.

Note that up until this point all the focus is on the Jews and Israel.

It is comforting to see how the Lord directs the path of one who is sincerely seeking truth from God's word. It also shows that an individual will not always come to an intuitive knowledge of truth, without some other input. This is perhaps to bind believers together as a common body.

The Ethiopian is a Chancellor of the Exchequer, a man of high rank and trust. He was also a eunuch, a castrated male. These men were often put in charge of the women's quarters or harems. They were relatively safe people to have around since they would not produce offspring to challenge the throne and the king. *Dan*

1:3 And the king spake unto Ashpenaz the master of his eunuchs, that he should bring certain of the children of Israel, and of the king's seed, and of the princes. They could marry. Gen 39:1 And Joseph was brought down to Egypt; and Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, captain of the guard, an Egyptian, bought him of the hands of the Ishmeelites, which had brought him down thither. Gen 39:7 And it came to pass after these things, that his master's wife cast her eyes upon Joseph; and she said, Lie with me. An officer of Pharaoh. The ancient Hebrew word officer could be translated eunuch. It was a common practice in ancient times to make those highest in the royal courts eunuchs, to ensure they would be wholly devoted to their king. Because this practice was common, the term came to be used for all who served in important positions in a king's court, whether they were actually eunuchs or not. Therefore, we really don't absolutely know if Potiphar was a eunuch.

It was not the practice of the Jews to castrate, rather it was the pagans. Under law such people were outside of the congregation. *Deu 23:1 He that is wounded in the stones, or hath his privy member cut off, shall not enter into the congregation of the LORD.* They could produce no offspring and no seed. They were impotent. We see in this account that the Eunuch is welcome in the New Testament Kingdom.

The Ethiopian we see is also impotent spiritually. Perhaps he had gained knowledge that the Lord of compassion would not keep him separate from the congregation of God's people. Certainly he would remain separate under Judaism, but there was talk in scripture of one who would reconcile and forgive transgression.

The Ethiopian Eunuch was a wealthy and educated man. He possessed his own manuscript (scroll) at a time when few could read outside of the scribes and priests, at a time where personal Bibles were not known as we know them, but study alone did not answer his question "Who was Isaiah speaking of?"

This passage does two things. Firstly it rebukes the critics who deny it was written by Isaiah. Secondly it makes it clearly and unequivocally a Messianic passage, that is it refers to Jesus. *Act 8:35 Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus.*

Isaiah does not speak about Christian baptism, so we deduce that Philip introduced this into his testimony. There was no six week Bible course to prove the Ethiopian was a genuine or worthy convert. There was no creed to learn or assent to before admission was granted. There was no demand for church membership before the act was performed.

Water is present and they both go down. A man does not baptise himself, why?

- 1) Baptism is an act of obedience. *Act 2:38 Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.*
- 2) It is a privilege and subject to conditions. *Act 8:36 And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptised? Act 10:47 Can any man*

forbid water, that these should not be baptised, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?

- 3) If conditions are met it can be commanded (demanded) of a believer. *Act 10:48 And he commanded them to be baptised in the name of the Lord. Then prayed they him to tarry certain days.*
- 4) It may come after the reception of the Holy Spirit or before. *Act 8:13 Then Simon himself believed also: and when he was baptised, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done. Act 8:14 Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John: Act 8:15 Who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost: Act 8:16 (For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptised in the name of the Lord Jesus.)*
- 5) It is a testimony to God of a clear conscience. *1Pe 3:21 The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.*
- 6) It is also the outward sign of the inward act, in the washing away of sins, as the Lord's Table associates with death and life. *Act 22:15 For thou shalt be his witness unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard. Act 22:16 And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptised, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.*
- 7) It marks the cutting off of the old life as a burial. *Rom 6:3 Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptised into Jesus Christ were baptised into his death?*

A man cannot bury himself. In this respect baptism loses its symbolism if a man performs it on his own self. It loses that aspect of death. A man must desire to die so that he might live to Christ.

Today many desire Christ and life in the flesh. They want Christ and the old man "unharmd" by Christ. It is not possible. *Rom 6:6 Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.* If we die in the death of Christ we must live in the resurrection of Christ. *Rom 6:4 Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.*

This aspect of baptism is seldom stressed. That is "are you really prepared to die and start a new life?"

Many people like new starts, their so called Christian lives are full of them, they are "born again" many times to fail. That is because they never start by dying. They want the power of life without death first working. They want power in the old man, not in the new. The old man cannot contain the power of Christ and so it will always end in failure.

Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch Part 2

Philip the evangelist is directed into the road where he would meet with this Ethiopian. When the churches in Samaria were settled, and had ministers appointed them, the apostles went back to Jerusalem; but Philip stays, expecting to be employed in breaking fresh ground in the country. Here we have direction given him by an angel (possibly in a dream or vision of the night) what course to steer. Arise, and go towards the south. Though angels were not employed to preach the gospel, they were often employed in carrying messages to ministers for advice and encouragement.

Philip must go southward, to the way that leads from Jerusalem to Gaza, through the desert or wilderness of Judah. I am assuming that he went to Jerusalem with the others. *Act 8:25 And they, when they had testified and preached the word of the Lord, returned to Jerusalem, and preached the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans.* He might never have thought of going into a desert, into a common road through the desert, small probability of finding work there! Yet he is sent here, according to our Saviour's parable, fore-telling the call of the Gentiles, Go you into the highways, and the hedges, Matt. 22:9. Sometimes God opens a door of opportunity to his ministers in places very unlikely, possibly the same area that John the Baptist had worked. See the obedience to this direction, He arose and went, without objecting, or so much as asking, "What business have I there?" Or, "What likelihood is there of doing good there?" He went out, not knowing where he went, or whom he was to meet.

An account is given of this eunuch, who and what he was, on whom this distinguishing favour was bestowed.

He was a proselyte to the Jewish religion, for he came to Jerusalem to worship. Some think that he was a proselyte of righteousness, who was circumcised, and kept the feasts, others that he was only a proselyte of the gate, a Gentile, but one who had renounced idolatry, and worshipped the God of Israel occasionally in the court of the Gentiles. Some think that there were remains of the knowledge of the true God in his country, ever since the queen of Sheba's time, and probably the ancestor of this eunuch was one of her attendants, who transmitted to his posterity what he learned at Jerusalem.

Philip is ordered to fall into company with this traveller who is going home from Jerusalem towards Gaza, thinking he has done all the business of his journey, when the great business which the overruling providence of God designed in it was not yet done. He had been at Jerusalem, where the apostles were preaching the Christian faith, and multitudes professing it, and yet there he had taken no notice of it, and made no enquiries after it, nay, it should seem, had slighted it, and turned his back upon it, yet the grace of God pursues him, overtakes him in the desert, and there overcomes him. Thus God is often found of those that sought him not, Isa. 65:1. Philip has this order, not by an angel, as before, but by the Spirit whispering it in his ear, "*Go near, and join thyself to this chariot, go so near as that gentleman may take notice of thee.*" We should study to do good to those we light in company with upon the road, thus the lips of the righteous may feed many. We should not be so shy of all strangers as some seem to be. Of those of whom we know nothing else we know this, that they have souls.

Perhaps the eunuch was now reading over again those portions of scripture which he had heard read and expounded at Jerusalem, that he might recollect what he had heard.

It is the duty of every one of us to study the Holy Scriptures. It is wisdom for men of business to redeem time for holy duties, time is precious, and it is the best husbandry in the world to gather up the fragments of time, that none be lost, to fill up every minute with something that will turn to a good account. Those that are diligent in searching the scriptures are in a fair way to improve in knowledge, for to him that hath shall be given.

Philip puts a fair question to him, understandest thou what thou readest? Not by way of reproach, but with design to offer him his service. What we read and hear of the word of God it highly concerns us to understand, especially what we read and hear concerning Christ, and therefore we should often ask ourselves whether we understand it or not. As Jesus said Have you understood all these things? Matt. 13:51. And have you understood them right? We cannot profit by the scriptures unless we do in some measure understand them. And, blessed by God, what is necessary to salvation is easy to be understood.

The eunuch senses his need of assistance and desires Philip's company, "How can I understand, says he, except someone guide me? Therefore pray come up, and sit with me."

He speaks as one that had very humble thoughts of himself, and his own capacity and attainments. He was so far from taking it as an affront to be asked whether he understood what he read, though Philip was a stranger, on foot, (which many a less man would have called him an impertinent fellow, and bid him go about his business, what was it to him?) that he takes the question kindly, makes a very modest reply, How can I? We have reason to think he was an intelligent man, and as well acquainted with the meaning of scripture as most were, and yet he modestly confesses his weakness. Those that would learn must see their need to be taught.

He speaks as one very desirous to be taught, to have someone to guide him. He still read the scripture, though there were many things in it which he did not understand. Though there are many things in the scriptures which are dark and hard to be understood, which are often misunderstood, we must not throw them away, but study them for the sake of those things that are easy, which is the likeliest way to come by degrees to the understanding of those things that are difficult, for knowledge and grace grow gradually.

The Ethiopian invited Philip to come up and sit with him, not as Jehu took Jonadab into his chariot, to come and see his zeal for the Lord of hosts (2 Kgs. 10:16), but rather, "Come, see my ignorance, and instruct me." He will gladly do Philip the honour to take him into the coach with him, if Philip will do him the favour to expound a portion of scripture to him. In order for our right understanding of the scripture, it is requisite we should have someone to guide us, some good books, and some good men, but, above all, the Spirit of grace, to lead us into all truth.

We see the portion of scripture which the eunuch recited, with some hints of Philip's discourse upon it. The preachers of the gospel had a very good handle to

take hold of those who were conversant with the scriptures of the Old Testament and received them, especially when they found them actually engaged in the study of them, as the eunuch was here.

The chapter he was reading was the fifty-third of Isaiah, two verses of which are quoted. *Isa 53:7 He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth. Isa 53:8 He was taken from prison and from judgement: and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken.*

The verses (Isa. 53:7, 8; Acts 8:32, 33) foretold the following concerning the Messiah, that He should die, should be led to the slaughter, as sheep that were offered in sacrifice, that His life should be taken from among men, taken from the earth. With what little reason then was the death of Christ a stumbling-block to the unbelieving Jews, when it was so plainly foretold by their own prophets, and was so necessary to the accomplishment of His undertaking!

That He should die wrongfully, should die by violence, should be hurried out of His life, and His judgement shall be taken away, no justice done to Him, for He must be cut off, but not for Himself.

That He should die patiently. Like a lamb dumb before the butcher, so He opened not His mouth. Never was there such an example of patience as our Lord Jesus was in His sufferings, when He was accused, when He was abused, He was silent, reviled not again, threatened not.

That yet He should live forever, to ages which cannot be numbered, for so I understand those words, who shall declare His generation? The Hebrew word properly signifies the duration of one life, Eccl. 1:4. Now who can conceive or express how long He shall continue, notwithstanding this, for His life is taken only from the earth, in heaven He shall live to endless and innumerable ages, as it follows in Isa. 53:10; He shall prolong His days.

The eunuch's question upon this is, of whom speaketh the prophet this? He does not desire Philip to give him some critical remarks upon the words and phrases, and the idioms of the language, but to acquaint him with the general scope and design of the prophecy, to furnish him with a key, in the use of which he might, by comparing one thing with another, be led into the meaning of the particular passage.

Prophecies had usually something obscure in them, till they were explained by the fulfilment of them, as this now was. It is a material question he asks, and a very sensible one: "Does the prophet speak this of himself, in expectation of being used, being misused, as the other prophets were? or does he speak it of some other man, in his own age, or in some age to come?" Though the modern Jews will not allow it to be spoken of the Messiah, yet their ancient doctors did so interpret it, and perhaps the eunuch knew this, and did partly understand it so himself, only he proposed this question, to draw on discourse with Philip, for the way to improve in learning is to consult the learned. As they must enquire the law at the mouth of the priests (Mal. 2:7), so they must enquire of the gospel,

especially that part of the treasure which is hid in the field of the Old Testament, at the mouth of the ministers of Christ.

The way to receive good instructions is to ask good questions.

Philip takes this fair occasion given him to open to him the great mystery of the gospel concerning Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. He began at this scripture, took this for his text (as Christ did another passage of the same prophecy, Luke 4:21), and preached unto him Jesus. This is all the account given us of Philip's sermon, because it was the same in effect with Peter's sermons, which we have heard before. The business of gospel ministers is to preach Jesus, and this is the preaching that is likely to do good. And here we have an instance of speaking of the things of God, and speaking of them to good purpose, not only as we sit in the house, but as we walk by the way, according to that rule.

Deu 6:6 And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: Deu 6:7 And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.

The eunuch is baptised in the name of Christ. It is probable that the eunuch had heard at Jerusalem of the doctrine of Christ, so that it was not altogether new to him. But, if he had, what could that do towards this speedy conquest that was made of his heart for Christ. It was a powerful working of the Spirit with and by Philip's preaching that gained the point.

Now here we see,

The modest proposal which the eunuch made of himself for baptism. As they went on their way, discoursing of Christ, the eunuch asking more questions and Philip answering them to his satisfaction, they came unto a certain water, a well, river, or pond, the sight of which made the eunuch think of being baptised. Thus God, by hints of providence which seem casual, sometimes puts his people in mind of their duty, of which otherwise perhaps they would not have thought. The eunuch didn't know how long a while Philip might be with him, nor where he might afterwards enquire for him. He could not expect his travelling with him to his next stage, and therefore, if Philip thinks fit, he will take the present convenience which offers itself of being baptised: "See, here is water, which perhaps we may not meet with a great while again; what doth hinder me to be baptised? Can you show any cause why I should not be admitted a disciple and follower of Christ by baptism?"

He does not demand baptism, does not say, "Here is water and here I am resolved I will be baptised;" for, if Philip have anything to offer to the contrary, he is willing to waive it for the present. If he think him not fit to be baptised, or if there be any thing in the institution of the ordinance which will not admit such a speedy administration of it, he will not insist upon it. The most forward zeal must submit to order and rule.

He does desire it, and, unless Philip can show cause why not, he desires it now, and is not willing to defer it. In the solemn dedicating and devoting of ourselves to God, it is good to make haste, and not to delay, for the present time is the best time. Those who have received the thing signified by baptism should not

put off receiving the sign. The eunuch feared lest the good affections now working in him should cool and abate, and therefore was willing immediately to bind his soul with the baptismal bonds unto the Lord, that he might bring the matter to an issue.

The fair declaration which Philip made him of the terms upon which he might have the privilege of baptism, "If thou believest with all thy heart, thou mayest, that is, If thou believest this doctrine which I have preached to thee concerning Jesus, if thou receivest the record God has given concerning him, and set to thy seal that it is true." He must believe with all his heart, for with the heart man believeth, not with the head only, by an assent to gospel truths in the understanding; but with the heart, by a consent of the will to gospel terms.

The confession of faith which the eunuch made in order to his being baptised. It is very short, but it is comprehensive and much to the purpose, and what was sufficient, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. He was before a worshipper of the true God, so that all he had to do now was to receive Christ Jesus the Lord. He believes that Jesus is the Christ, the true Messiah promised, the anointed One. That Christ is Jesus, the Saviour, the only Saviour of his people from their sins. That this Jesus Christ is the Son of God, that He has a divine nature, as the Son is of the same nature with the Father; and that, being the Son of God, He is the heir of all things. This is the principal peculiar doctrine of Christianity, and whosoever believes this with all their hearts, and confess it, they are to be baptised.

The baptising of him hereupon. The eunuch ordered his coachman to stop, commanded the chariot to stand still. It was the best baiting place he ever met with in any of his journeys. They went down both into the water.

Though Philip had very lately been deceived in Simon Magus, and had admitted him to baptism, though he afterwards appeared to be no true convert, yet he did not therefore hesitate to baptise the eunuch upon his profession of faith immediately, without putting him upon a longer trial than usual. If some hypocrites appear, who afterwards prove a grief and scandal to us, they shall answer for their apostasy, and not we.

Philip and the eunuch are separated presently, and this is as surprising as the other parts of the story. One would have expected that the eunuch should either have stayed with Philip, or have taken him along with him into his own country, and, there being so many ministers in those parts, he might be spared, and it would be worthwhile, but God ordered otherwise. As soon as they had come up out of the water, before the eunuch went into his chariot again, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, and did not give him time to make an exhortation to the eunuch, as usual after baptism, which it is probable the one intended and the other expected. But his sudden departure was sufficient to make up the want of that exhortation, for it seems to have been miraculous, carried out of his sight. He was caught away, and the eunuch saw him no more, but, having lost his minister, returned to the use of his Scripture again.

Now here we are told,

How the eunuch was disposed, He went on his way rejoicing. He pursued his journey. Business called him home, and he must hasten to it, for it was no way

inconsistent with his Christianity, which places no sanctity nor perfection in men's being hermits or recluses, but is a religion which men may and ought to carry about with them into the affairs of this life. But he went on rejoicing; so far was he from reflecting upon this sudden revolution and change, or advancement rather, in his religion, with any regret, that his second thoughts confirmed him abundantly in it, and he went on, rejoicing with joy unspeakable and full of glory, he was never better pleased in all his life.

He rejoiced that he himself was joined to Christ and had an interest in him. And that he had these good tidings to bring to his countrymen, and a prospect of bringing them also, by virtue of his interest among them, into fellowship with Christ, for he returned, not only a Christian, but a minister.

Philip was found at Azotus or *Ashdod*, formerly a city of the Philistines, which was about thirty miles from Gaza, where the eunuch was also probably going, and where Dr. Lightfoot thinks he took ship, and went by sea into his own country. But Philip, wherever he was, would not be idle. On his way home he preached in all the cities till he came to Caesarea, and there he settled, and it appears, had his principal residence ever after, for later at Caesarea we find him in a house of his own, Acts 21:8. He that had been faithful in working for Christ as an itinerant at length gains a settlement.

Let's see his journey.



There is no explanation of how Philip got to Azotus, he could have walked and the Ethiopian been blinded to see him walk off, all we can confirm is where we meet Philip next.

When evangelists preach, every Scripture leads to Jesus. Jesus is the central point of the Bible. The Old Testament is Jesus concealed, the New Testament is Jesus revealed. Every verse in the Old Testament points forward to Jesus and every verse in the New Testament points backward to Jesus. No matter where one starts reading in the Bible, the Scripture leads to Jesus. The difference between a real evangelist and another preacher who just uses the title is how much they talk about Jesus. For the real evangelist it doesn't matter what subject he's talking about or where he begins to read in the Bible, ultimately, his or her sermon will be about Jesus Christ.

The Spirit sends evangelists wherever they are most needed. Philip was caught away and reappeared in another city where he continued to preach. Evangelists are the shock troops of the kingdom. Their function is similar to the Navy Seals or Army paratroopers who are the first to advance into enemy territory to prepare the way for the main battle group. The evangelist moves in, does his or her job, and then moves on to his or her next assignment.

While culture and location may be different today, the principles one can take from Philip and his evangelistic ministry are still relevant today. Context may change, but the message of the Good News always remains the same!

Acts Chapter 9

In this chapter we have:

The famous story of Saul's conversion from being an outrageous persecutor of the gospel of Christ to being an illustrious professor and preacher of it.

How he was first awakened by an appearance of Christ Himself to him as he was going upon an errand of persecution to Damascus, and what a condition he was in while he lay under the power of those convictions and terrors.

How he was baptised by Ananias, by immediate directions from heaven.

How he immediately preached the faith of Christ, and proved what he preached.

How he was persecuted, and narrowly escaped with his life.

How he was admitted into the brethren at Jerusalem, how he preached, and was persecuted there.

The peace which the churches enjoyed for some time after this.

The cure wrought by Peter on Aeneas, who had long been laid up with a palsy.

The raising of Tabitha from death to life, at the prayer of Peter.

We found mention made of Saul three times in the story of Stephen, it seems that Luke wanted to come to his story, and now we are come to it, not quite taking leave of Peter but from here on we will be mostly taken up with Paul the apostle of the Gentiles, as Peter was of the Jews.

The Conversion of Saul

Act 9:1 And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, Act 9:2 And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem. Act 9:3 And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: Act 9:4 And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? Act 9:5 And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. Act 9:6 And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do. Act 9:7 And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man. Act 9:8 And Saul arose from the earth; and when his eyes were opened, he saw no man: but they led him by the hand, and brought him into Damascus. Act 9:9 And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink. Act 9:10 And there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias; and to him said the Lord in a vision, Ananias. And he said, Behold, I am here, Lord. Act 9:11 And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and enquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul, of Tarsus: for, behold, he prayeth, Act 9:12 And hath seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in, and putting his hand on him, that he might receive his sight. Act 9:13 Then Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem: Act 9:14 And here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on thy name. Act 9:15 But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel: Act 9:16 For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake. Act 9:17 And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost. Act 9:18 And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptised.

Saul is one of seven people in the Bible that God calls by name twice. The others are Abraham, Jacob, Moses, Martha, Simon and Samuel.

He was called by his name, and that doubled, Saul, Saul. Some think, in calling him Saul, he hints at that great persecutor of David whose name he bore. He was indeed a second Saul, and such an enemy to the Son of David as the other was to David.

Calling him by his name intimates the particular regard that Christ had to him. His calling him by name brought the conviction home to his conscience, and put it past dispute to whom the voice spoke this.

This event is repeatedly referred to as Paul shares it in his letters. I also notice that this all happens outside of Jerusalem and even Israel, in Gentile lands which are where Paul's ministry will take place.

Paul is in the vicinity of Damascus which is today the capital and largest city of Syria, the oldest inhabited capital in the world and, according to some, the fourth holiest city in Islam.

Damascus is surprisingly mentioned sixty times in fifty five verses in our Bibles, and I'd like to look at a few of the events and people that are connected.

The first mention of Damascus in the Bible is in connection with Abraham's rescue of Lot after he was kidnapped by a confederation of Mesopotamian kings. Abraham's senior servant Eliezer was from Damascus.

Gen 14:15 And he divided himself against them, he and his servants, by night, and smote them, and pursued them unto Hobah, which is on the left hand of Damascus.

Gen 15:1 After these things the word of the LORD came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward. Gen 15:2 And Abram said, Lord GOD, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus?

The Bible does not refer to the city again until the time of David when Damascus and its kings began numerous dealings with Israel. As part of the Aramaean confederacy, Damascus was often associated with wars against Israel. King David eventually conquered the Aramaean kingdom of Syria, but King Rezin of Damascus regained control of Syria during Solomon's reign.

2Sa 8:5 And when the Syrians of Damascus came to succour Hadadezer king of Zobah, David slew of the Syrians two and twenty thousand men. 2Sa 8:6 Then David put garrisons in Syria of Damascus: and the Syrians became servants to David, and brought gifts. And the LORD preserved David whithersoever he went.

1Ki 11:23 And God stirred him up another adversary, Rezon the son of Eliadah, which fled from his lord Hadadezer king of Zobah: 1Ki 11:24 And he gathered men unto him, and became captain over a band, when David slew them of Zobah: and they went to Damascus, and dwelt therein, and reigned in Damascus. 1Ki 11:25 And he was an adversary to Israel all the days of Solomon, beside the mischief that Hadad did: and he abhorred Israel, and reigned over Syria.

After Solomon's death, Israel was divided into two kingdoms, and Damascus increased in power. At different times, both Israel and Judah made pacts with the ruling kings of Damascus.

1Ki 15:18 Then Asa took all the silver and the gold that were left in the treasures

of the house of the LORD, and the treasures of the king's house, and delivered them into the hand of his servants: and king Asa sent them to Benhadad, the son of Tabrimon, the son of Hezion, king of Syria, that dwelt at Damascus, saying, 1Ki 15:19 There is a league between me and thee, and between my father and thy father: behold, I have sent unto thee a present of silver and gold; come and break thy league with Baasha king of Israel, that he may depart from me. 1Ki 15:20 So Benhadad hearkened unto king Asa, and sent the captains of the hosts which he had against the cities of Israel, and smote Ijon, and Dan, and Abelbethmaachah, and all Cinneroth, with all the land of Naphtali.

Eventually, this led to Damascus dominating both Hebrew kingdoms. For the remainder of the Old Testament, both the northern and southern kingdoms of Israel remained entangled with Damascus in battles for control.

Naaman, the Syrian commander who encountered Elisha, lived in Damascus and when Elisha told Naaman to wash in the muddy waters of the Jordan River to be cured of leprosy, he angrily answered. *2Ki 5:11 But Naaman was wroth, and went away, and said, Behold, I thought, He will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the LORD his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper. 2Ki 5:12 Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? may I not wash in them, and be clean? So he turned and went away in a rage.*

The Bible contains a startling prophecy concerning Damascus. *Isa 17:1 The burden of Damascus. Behold, Damascus is taken away from being a city, and it shall be a ruinous heap. Isa 17:2 The cities of Aroer are forsaken: they shall be for flocks, which shall lie down, and none shall make them afraid. Isa 17:3 The fortress also shall cease from Ephraim, and the kingdom from Damascus, and the remnant of Syria: they shall be as the glory of the children of Israel, saith the LORD of hosts.*

The destruction of Damascus that Isaiah foretold was linked to the defeat of the northern kingdom of Israel, called "Ephraim" here. This prophecy could have been fulfilled c. 732 BC when the Assyrians attacked Aram.

2Ki 16:7 So Ahaz sent messengers to Tiglathpileser king of Assyria, saying, I am thy servant and thy son: come up, and save me out of the hand of the king of Syria, and out of the hand of the king of Israel, which rise up against me. 2Ki 16:8 And Ahaz took the silver and gold that was found in the house of the LORD, and in the treasures of the king's house, and sent it for a present to the king of Assyria. 2Ki 16:9 And the king of Assyria hearkened unto him: for the king of Assyria went up against Damascus, and took it, and carried the people of it captive to Kir, and slew Rezin.

Moving forward Damascus was conquered by Alexander the Great. After the death of Alexander in 323 BC, Damascus became the site of a struggle between the Seleucid and Ptolemaic empires. The control of the city passed frequently from one empire to the other. Seleucus I Nicator, one of Alexander's generals, made Antioch the capital of his vast empire, which led to the decline of Damascus' importance compared with new Seleucid cities such as Syrian Laodicea in the north. Later, Demetrius III Philopator rebuilt the city according to the Greek hippodamian system (a grid system) and renamed it "Demetrias"

In 64 BC, the Roman general Pompey annexed the western part of Syria. The Romans occupied Damascus and subsequently incorporated it into the league of ten cities known as the Decapolis which themselves were incorporated into the province of Syria and granted autonomy

So we now know the background to the area where Jesus confronts Saul, the charge held against him is, Why persecutest thou me? Before Saul was made a saint, he was made to see himself a sinner, a great sinner, a sinner against Christ. Now he was made to see that evil in himself which he never saw before.

Why persecutest thou me? He thought he was persecuting only a company of poor, weak people, that were an offence and eye-sore to the Pharisees, little imagining that it was one in heaven that he was all this while insulting for surely, if he had known, he would not have persecuted the Lord of glory. Those who persecute the saints persecute Christ himself, and He takes what is done against them as done against Himself, and accordingly will be the judgement in the great day, Matt. 25:45.

See Saul's question upon his indictment, and the reply to it.

He makes enquiry concerning Christ, Who art thou, Lord? He doesn't answer the question asked of him, perhaps being convicted by his own conscience, and self-condemned. If God contend with us for our sins, we are not able to answer for one of a thousand, especially such a one as the sin of persecution.

Convictions of sin, when they are set home with power upon the conscience, will silence all excuses and self-justifications. Saul desires to know who his judge is, and he is respectful, Lord. He who had been a blasphemer of Christ's name now speaks to Him as his Lord.

The question is proper: Who art thou? This implies his status as a stranger to Christ, he knew not His voice as His own sheep do, but he desired to be acquainted with Him, he is convinced by this light which encloses him that it is one from heaven that speaks to him, and he has a veneration for everything that appears to him to come from heaven.

Saul and Paul

Before we go any further I would like to be clear about Saul and Paul, they are exactly the same person, but where a person has two names it can be confusing, but also significant.

It is commonly thought that God renamed Saul after his conversion and that "Saul" indicates the persecutor, while "Paul" refers to the changed, Christian man. However, in Acts 9:17, Ananias refers to him as Saul after his conversion. Later in Acts the Holy Spirit addresses him as Saul before he sets off on his first missionary trip. *Act 13:2 As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.*

In fact, he is referred to as Saul 11 times after his Damascus Road experience. It is when he sets out from Jerusalem in Acts 13 that Luke begins to refer to him as Paul, which is in fact, the Greek version of the Hebrew name “Saul.”

The custom of dual names was common in those days. Acts 13:9 describes the apostle as “Saul, who was also called Paul, so you see he didn’t ever stop being called Saul.

Paul was a Jew, born in the Roman city of Tarsus. He was proud of his Jewish heritage, as he describes in Philippians 3:5: “Circumcised on the eighth day, of the race of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrew parentage, in observance of the law a Pharisee.” So zealous and devout was he that persecuting Christians was the natural way for him to show his devotion. He chose to use his Hebrew name, Saul, until sometime after he began to believe in and preach Christ. After that time, as “the apostle to the Gentiles” (Romans 11:13), he used his Roman name, Paul. It would make sense for Paul to use his Roman name as he travelled further and further into the Gentile world.

It is interesting that Paul began using his Roman name on Cyprus when the Roman proconsul on that island was converted (Acts 13:12). This was during Paul’s first missionary journey and involved a high-ranking, idolatrous Gentile coming to faith in Christ. The fact that the proconsul’s name was Sergius Paulus has led some to think that Saul took the name Paulus/Paul as a reminder of this event, but the apostle’s name being the same as the proconsul’s is to me a coincidence.

Using his Roman name was fitting for the man who proclaimed that he would become “all things to all people,” a Jew to the Jews in order to win the Jews, weak to the weak in order to win the weak, etc., all for the sake of the gospel (1 Corinthians 9:19–23). Adopting his Roman name would allow Paul to approach the Gentiles to whom he was sent and speak to them in their own language, becoming as one of them and setting them at ease. It is also possible that Paul gave up the use of his Hebrew name, Saul, with its regal connotation and chose to use his Roman name, Paul, meaning “little” or “small,” because he desired to become smaller in order to present Christ as greater.

Let’s see what we know about the man, I will divide these explanations into two parts and entitle them Paul and Saul. Saul is BC and Paul is AD.

Saul

We first met Saul “consenting” to the death of Stephen. *Act 7:58 And cast him out of the city, and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul. Act 7:59 And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. Act 8:1 And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution*

against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles.

What was the background of this man who was to become one of the greatest exponents of Christianity? The scriptures never give us a clue.

He came from Tarsus, was a Jew of that city of Cilicia and a student of Gamaliel who taught in Jerusalem.

Act 9:11 And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and enquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul, of Tarsus: for, behold, he prayeth.

Act 21:39 But Paul said, I am a man which am a Jew of Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, a citizen of no mean city: and, I beseech thee, suffer me to speak unto the people.

Act 22:3 I am verily a man which am a Jew, born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, yet brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, and taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers, and was zealous toward God, as ye all are this day.

Tarsus is today a city of Turkey lying to the South East of the Tarsus Mountains and a few miles from the Mediterranean Sea. Tarsus lay on a trading route to Asia Minor and people went through the Cilician Gates, one of the most important mountain passes (across the Tarsus Mountains).



According to a secular historian Strabo, the Tarsians had an enthusiasm for education and philosophy which surpassed that of the Athenians and Alexandrians. The University of Tarsus was largely attended by Cilician students

and supported by the state. This was without doubt because of its location, a cosmopolitan city, a place on the main news routes and subject to all manner of strange beliefs and practices. Saul would have been a man enlightened in his age.

Tarsus enjoyed another privilege it was favoured by Rome and following the settlement of Pompeii (65-64 BC) the Jews were granted Roman citizenship. Paul appeals to his roots when he is wrongfully arrested. *Act 22:25 And as they bound him with thongs, Paul said unto the centurion that stood by, Is it lawful for you to scourge a man that is a Roman, and uncondemned?*

Saul then was a Jew and a Roman citizen and these “dual passports” would open routes for the gospel.

We learn further that he was of the tribe of Benjamin and of the strict Jews called Pharisees. *Php 3:5 Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; Php 3:6 Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.*

He boasted of his zealousness above his contemporaries particularly in his persecution of the church. *Gal 1:13 For ye have heard of my conversation in time past in the Jews' religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it: Gal 1:14 And profited in the Jews' religion above many my equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers.*

Saul was a man who viewed the early church as a threat to the established religion, Judaism. It appeared to undermine and contradict the Mosaic institutes, but we even see Christian Jews with the same attitude. *Act 15:5 But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses.*

We glimpse the turmoil in the mind of Saul as he relates his pre-Christian experience as one trapped by the Mosaic Law. He aspired to good, driven on towards legal righteousness yet never attaining it. He was like a climber who found the rocks more slippery by the day and lost ground every time he made an effort to go up.

The more he knew the more he died. *Rom 7:10 And the commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death.*

The things that he abhorred he did, the things he aspired to he could not achieve.

Rom 7:15 I am frustrated with what I do! For having been restored to trust, I want to do what is in harmony with God and his methods and principles; but I find that even though I trust God, my old habits, conditioned responses, preconceived ideas and other remnants of the devastation caused by distrust and selfishness are not yet fully removed.

Rom 7:19 For the old habits and conditioned responses are not the good I want to do: No! They are remnants of my selfish, unconverted mind. (Remedy)

It was all in all a body of death. Rom 7:24 O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?

He was then sensitive as an unbeliever to the requirements of the law, but trapped in a system that could grant him no relief. Righteousness did not come from the law. *Gal 2:21 I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain.*

You may rely on this phenomenon of failure. It is universal. *Rom 3:23 For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.* It is the Archimedean point for evangelism and it is the place where we prise the lid off a man's life. It is where we draw the cloaks of life from his inward parts and lay them under the gaze of God Almighty. Stephen does this and it cuts deep. *Act 7:51 Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye.* I believe Paul was cut with them. I imagine also that the more Christians that he persecuted the more he was roused by their confidence in God, a confidence he lacked because he was a guilty sinner. He was approaching a crisis. We shall examine this next.

Paul

Saul was consumed with a passion to wreck the church. He had no answer for their teaching except to throw them in prison. *Act 8:3 As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison.* Where was the power of reason in this great Jew? I believe it was stifled by the passion of hatred. The hatred boiled to the point of murder as he searched for the people of the way. *Act 9:1 And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest.*

We come across men like this in our own lives, who are set against the Lord, set in their own ways. They respond in varying degrees of animosity from avoiding you to more vicious and spiteful attacks. We perhaps despair of seeing these people saved, but here we are given grounds to hope. We doubt along with brother Ananias that a leopard can change its spots. It cannot but God can. *Act 9:13 Then Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem: Act 9:14 And here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on thy name. Act 9:15 But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel: Act 9:16 For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake. Act 9:17 And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said,*

Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost. Act 9:18 And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptised. We often see that those who were greatly opposed to the faith of Christ suffer the most powerful and violent reversals.

Now we cannot say of Paul as he rode to Damascus that he was seeking the Lord. He is not in the frame of mind enjoyed by the Ethiopian on the Southern road. He had no inkling of what was about to happen to him and it would have been the last thing that he would have desired, to become a Christian.

I do not believe that the individual makes that initial step towards God. As a dead man he is senseless to divine reality, blind to goodness. *Eph 2:1 And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins.* His life is encompassed by the imaginations of his evil heart. He erects walls of unbelief capped with turrets of unbelief and false philosophy. There are no absolutes in this cage which he builds, yet he is content to dwell there. There are many exhortations to seek the Lord, but it is not what they do naturally. *Isa 55:6 Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near. Rom 3:11 There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God.*

Men do not want to receive the Lord, they have an ingrained hatred and this shows in their disobedience towards His commands.

The circumstances of conversion vary from the point of view of associated phenomenon and experience, yet one thing is clear, there is a change in the direction of life for the individual. *Act 9:21 But all that heard him were amazed, and said; Is not this he that destroyed them which called on this name in Jerusalem, and came hither for that intent, that he might bring them bound unto the chief priests?* Where changes do not occur we are right to question the validity of the conversion experience.

Paul's experience on the Damascus road has become the archetype of conversions, the blinding light (seeing the light) the voice of God from heaven and the sudden change of purpose. It is the example of instant conversion for many people, however this does not appear to be borne out by the text.

It was three days before he emerged to meet the other disciples. *Act 9:8 And Saul arose from the earth; and when his eyes were opened, he saw no man: but they led him by the hand, and brought him into Damascus. Act 9:9 And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink. Act 9:19 And when he had received meat, he was strengthened. Then was Saul certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus.* He was also disabled during his confrontation with Christ. A more rapid conversion is the Philippian jailor. The conversion of Saul is unique and cannot be advanced as the rule for the conversion of everyone.

In this passage we have one of the apparent contradictions of scripture. *Act 22:9 And they that were with me saw indeed the light, and were afraid; but they heard not the voice of him that spake to me. Act 9:7 And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man.*

The solution to the difference is found in the grammar of the Greek language, namely the cases of the word. A case is the form or function of a word which shows its relation to some other word in the sentence (nominative, the genitive, the dative, the accusative, and the vocative.). In English case inflection is usual only in the genitive. "S" as in brother's or apostles. In pronouns the different forms survive i.e. he (noun native), him (accusative), his (genitive).

The two cases we are looking at here in Acts are ACCUSATIVE and GENITIVE of the noun voice. *Act 9:4 And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? Act 9:7 And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man. Act 22:9 And they that were with me saw indeed the light, and were afraid; but they heard not the voice of him that spake to me. (Greek - a voice).*

- 1) Cry. *Mat 2:18 In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not.*
- 2) Language or dialect. *1Co 14:10 There are, it may be, so many kinds of voices in the world, and none of them is without signification.*

Accusative is the direct object of the transitive verb.

Genitive is the case of possession.

It is these cases which make the distinction in the passage. The genitive is the voice as perceived by the outer ear, is the voice to the inner ear or the understanding. Hence the men with Paul heard with the outer ear or perceived the sound, but did not understand what was said.

Acts 9:7 is genitive and Acts 22:9 is accusative.

Observations:

- 1) God can convert the vilest sinner.
- 2) None is beyond the power of redemption.
- 3) Persecution of the saints is persecuting Jesus. If you are persecuted you are persecuted in the place of Christ.
- 4) God does not call all. He can be very specific shutting His word off from others. *Act 22:9 And they that were with me saw indeed the light, and were afraid; but they heard not the voice of him that spake to me.*
- 5) God does not always give a complete message. *Act 9:6 And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.*
- 6) There is no immediate rejoicing or dancing for joy. Was this a conversion experience?

Ananias expressed discomfort at going to him, and the Lord reassures him. See how kindly and gently the Lord allows his servant to reason with him.

Ananias pleads that this Saul was a notorious persecutor of the Disciples of Christ. He had been so at Jerusalem: "Lord, I have heard by many of this man, what a malicious enemy he is to the gospel of Christ, all those that were scattered upon the late persecution, many of whom are come to Damascus, tell how much evil he hath done to thy saints in Jerusalem, that he was the most virulent, violent persecutor of all, and a ringleader in the mischief.

Ananias never says no to the Lord, but he does act a little frightened.

Saul's errand to Damascus at this time is to persecute us Christians. Here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on Thy name, to treat the worshippers of Christ as the worst of criminals." Now, why does Ananias object to this? Not, "Therefore I do not owe him so much service. Why should I do him a kindness who has done and designed us so much unkindness?" No, Christ has taught us another lesson, to render good for evil, and pray for our persecutors, but if he be such a persecutor of Christians we must ask questions. Will it be safe for Ananias to go to him? Will he not throw himself like a lamb into the mouth of a lion? And, if he brings himself into trouble, he will be blamed for his indiscretion? Will it be to any purpose to go to him? Can such a hard heart ever be softened, or such like an Ethiopian ever change his skin?

Christ explains the destiny of Paul to Ananias

He was a vessel in which the gospel-treasure should be lodged, in order for the conveyance of it to many, an earthen vessel, but a chosen vessel. *2Co 4:7 But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.*

The vessel God uses He Himself chooses and it is fit He should Himself have the choosing of the instruments He employs. *Joh 15:16 Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you.* He is a vessel of honour, and must not be neglected in his present forlorn condition, nor thrown away as a despised broken vessel, or a vessel in which there is no pleasure.

He is designed:

For eminent service, He is to bear My name before the Gentiles, is to be the apostle of the Gentiles, and to carry the gospel to heathen nations. Christ's name is the standard to which souls must be gathered, and under which they must be enlisted, and Saul must be a standard-bearer. He must bear Christ's name, must bear witness to it before kings, king Agrippa and Caesar himself, nay, he must bear it before the children of Israel, though there were so many hands already at work about them.

For eminent sufferings Acts 9:16 *I will show him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake.* He that has been a persecutor shall be himself persecuted. Christ's showing him this intimates either His bringing him to these trials (as Ps. 60:3), *Thou hast shown thy people hard things*, or His giving notice of them

beforehand, that they might be no surprise to him. Those that bear Christ's name must expect to bear the cross for His name and those that do most for Christ are often called out to suffer most for Him.

Saul must suffer great things. This, one would think, was a cold comfort for a young convert, but it is only like telling a soldier of a bold and brave spirit, when he is enlisted, that he shall take the field, and enter upon action, shortly. Saul's sufferings for Christ shall contribute greatly to the honour of Christ and the service of the church, shall be so balanced with spiritual comforts and recompensed with eternal glories, that it is no discouragement to him to be told how great things he must suffer for Christ's name's sake.

Ananias presently goes on Christ's errand to Saul, and with good effect. He had started with a reservation against going to him, but, when an answer was given to it, he dropped the objection and did not insist upon it. When difficulties are removed, what have we to do but to go on with our work, and not hang onto an objection.

On a personal note I have not loved Paul and valued him as I should, if Christ can forgive him and treasure him then I should and I know that as we travel with him and listen to him this will change.

Next let us look a little deeper into visions at this point, we have two very different ones close together to think about, this is a big subject and so split into four parts.

Please note that Paul's conversion experience and seeing Jesus is not described in any way or place as a vision.

Visions Part 1

Act 9:10 And there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias; and to him said the Lord in a vision, Ananias. And he said, Behold, I am here, Lord. Act 9:11 And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and enquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul, of Tarsus: for, behold, he prayeth, Act 9:12 And hath seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in, and putting his hand on him, that he might receive his sight.

See the solidness of these two visions and their completeness. Ananias is told to ask for Saul, at Judas' house on Straight Street. Saul is told Ananias is coming and he will put his hands on you and you will see.

We aren't told the form of the visions they experience, waking, sleeping, trance etc. What we do know is that there is a revelation of the future for both of them.

Remember that Saul at this time was a blind man. Physical sight seems to be out of the equation here for him.

The story of Balaam's ass describes how we can be blinded to the supernatural. *Num 22:22 And God's anger was kindled because he went: and the angel of the LORD stood in the way for an adversary against him. Now he was riding upon his ass, and his two servants were with him. Num 22:23 And the ass saw the angel of the LORD standing in the way, and his sword drawn in his hand: and the ass turned aside out of the way, and went into the field: and Balaam smote the ass, to turn her into the way. Num 22:24 But the angel of the LORD stood in a path of the vineyards, a wall being on this side, and a wall on that side. Num 22:25 And when the ass saw the angel of the LORD, she thrust herself unto the wall, and crushed Balaam's foot against the wall: and he smote her again. Num 22:26 And the angel of the LORD went further, and stood in a narrow place, where was no way to turn either to the right hand or to the left. Num 22:27 And when the ass saw the angel of the LORD, she fell down under Balaam: and Balaam's anger was kindled, and he smote the ass with a staff. Num 22:28 And the LORD opened the mouth of the ass, and she said unto Balaam, What have I done unto thee, that thou hast smitten me these three times? Num 22:29 And Balaam said unto the ass, Because thou hast mocked me: I would there were a sword in mine hand, for now would I kill thee. Num 22:30 And the ass said unto Balaam, Am not I thine ass, upon which thou hast ridden ever since I was thine unto this day? was I ever wont to do so unto thee? And he said, Nay. Num 22:31 Then the LORD opened the eyes of Balaam, and he saw the angel of the LORD standing in the way, and his sword drawn in his hand: and he bowed down his head, and fell flat on his face. The prophet had his "eyes opened" by God.*

Similar examples are: *2Ki 6:14 Therefore sent he thither horses, and chariots, and a great host: and they came by night, and compassed the city about. 2Ki 6:15 And when the servant of the man of God was risen early, and gone forth, behold, an host compassed the city both with horses and chariots. And his servant said unto him, Alas, my master! how shall we do? 2Ki 6:16 And he answered, Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them. 2Ki 6:17 And Elisha prayed, and said, LORD, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And the LORD opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha. Luk 24:31 And their eyes were opened, and they knew him; and he vanished out of their sight.*

There is then a holding process or limitation to our sight. In the natural we see objects either because they emit light of a suitable wave length or that they reflect it. A room may be full of objects of different colours, but without a lamp you will see nothing. In a different light you may see something different, e.g. fluorescence. So it is then that God provides a lamp to enable us to see things not normally visible, yet often present.

Generally we are made aware of the invisible spiritual realm by the effects that it has, rather like "seeing" the wind blowing through corn on a summer's day.

Joh 8:44 Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is

no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it. We see "Satan" in his children.

By faith we see angels or principalities and powers. *1Co 11:10 For this cause ought the woman to have power on her head because of the angels. Eph 6:12 For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.*

A particular form of seeing is a vision. In the Old Testament this was a gift and it was linked to prophecy. *1Sa 9:9 (Beforetime in Israel, when a man went to enquire of God, thus he spake, Come, and let us go to the seer: for he that is now called a Prophet was beforetime called a Seer.)* I would suggest that this particular form of sight involves looking through God's eyes. As such it is a process that takes us out of time and enables us to view events not yet come to pass, but a certainty in the plan of God. *Act 9:12 And hath seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in, and putting his hand on him, that he might receive his sight.*

They may occur during waking moments or in the night and so may differ from dreams which are a phenomenon usually associated with sleep.

Act 10:3 He saw in a vision evidently about the ninth hour of the day an angel of God coming in to him, and saying unto him, Cornelius.

Gen 46:2 And God spake unto Israel in the visions of the night, and said, Jacob, Jacob. And he said, Here am I.

The vision may lead into the dream state. *Gen 15:1 After these things the word of the LORD came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward. Gen 15:12 And when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and, lo, an horror of great darkness fell upon him.*

Let us examine some of the New Testament visions:

- 1) The transfiguration. What are its elements? Sound, recognition of objects, revelation from God, fear (unsolicited). *Mat 17:3 And, behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with him. Mat 17:5 While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him. Mat 17:6 And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their face, and were sore afraid. Mat 17:9 And as they came down from the mountain, Jesus charged them, saying, Tell the vision to no man, until the Son of man be risen again from the dead.*
- 2) Zacharias. Fear, sound, prophecy, sign, recognition by others, waking state, angel, communication (unsolicited). *Luk 1:10 And the whole multitude of the people were praying without at the time of incense. Luk 1:11 And there appeared unto him an angel of the Lord standing on the*

right side of the altar of incense. Luk 1:12 And when Zacharias saw him, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him. Luk 1:13 But the angel said unto him, Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John. Luk 1:14 And thou shalt have joy and gladness; and many shall rejoice at his birth. Luk 1:15 For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb. Luk 1:16 And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God. Luk 1:17 And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord. Luk 1:18 And Zacharias said unto the angel, Whereby shall I know this? for I am an old man, and my wife well stricken in years. Luk 1:20 And, behold, thou shalt be dumb, and not able to speak, until the day that these things shall be performed, because thou believest not my words, which shall be fulfilled in their season. Luk 1:22 And when he came out, he could not speak unto them: and they perceived that he had seen a vision in the temple: for he beckoned unto them, and remained speechless.

- 3) Cornelius. Fear, plain sight, angel, revelation, communication, waking state. *Act 10:1 There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of the band called the Italian band, Act 10:2 A devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway. Act 10:3 He saw in a vision evidently about the ninth hour of the day an angel of God coming in to him, and saying unto him, Cornelius. Act 10:4 And when he looked on him, he was afraid, and said, What is it, Lord? And he said unto him, Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God.*

- 4) Peter. Revelation, instruction, communication, altered state, repeated for confirmation (unsolicited). *Act 10:10 And he became very hungry, and would have eaten: but while they made ready, he fell into a trance, Act 10:11 And saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending unto him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth: Act 10:12 Wherein were all manner of fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air. Act 10:13 And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter; kill, and eat. Act 10:14 But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean. Act 10:15 And the voice spake unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common. Act 10:16 This was done thrice: and the vessel was received up again into heaven.*

So far then we see a certain pattern occurring. Clearly the Lord does not limit His means of communication to us as through the written word (the Bible) alone. Visions are reality. Our brains are working on seeing and hearing without the physical eyes and ears being involved, the visual and auditory cortices are being stimulated.

This is extra sensory perception which is defined as: extrasensory perception, also known as a sixth sense, or cryptaesthesia, is a claimed paranormal ability

pertaining to reception of information not gained through the recognized physical senses, but sensed with the mind.

Visions Part 2.

We mentioned the heightened state of awareness sometimes occurring as a precursor to the visionary state.

Gen 2:21 And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof.

Gen 15:12 And when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and, lo, an horror of great darkness fell upon him.

In the New Testament the same state is rendered amazed or astonished, perhaps entranced would be better.

Mar 5:42 And straightway the damsel arose, and walked; for she was of the age of twelve years. And they were astonished with a great astonishment.

Act 3:10 And they knew that it was he which sat for alms at the Beautiful gate of the temple: and they were filled with wonder and amazement at that which had happened unto him.

The state of vision does not overrule reason or memory.

Act 11:5 I was in the city of Joppa praying: and in a trance I saw a vision, A certain vessel descend, as it had been a great sheet, let down from heaven by four corners; and it came even to me: Act 11:6 Upon the which when I had fastened mine eyes, I considered, and saw fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air.

Act 22:17 And it came to pass, that, when I was come again to Jerusalem, even while I prayed in the temple, I was in a trance; Act 22:18 And saw him saying unto me, Make haste, and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem: for they will not receive thy testimony concerning me. Act 22:19 And I said, Lord, they know that I imprisoned and beat in every synagogue them that believed on thee.

The visionary state would then appear to be a state of transition into another area of consciousness or awareness, without the loss or inhibition of any natural faculty. It is rather like being translated suddenly into a new scene.

There was confusion in Peter's mind when rescued from prison as to whether he was in the natural or visionary state. *Act 12:7 And, behold, the angel of the Lord came upon him, and a light shined in the prison: and he smote Peter on the side, and raised him up, saying, Arise up quickly. And his chains fell off from his hands.*

Act 12:8 And the angel said unto him, Gird thyself, and bind on thy sandals. And so he did. And he saith unto him, Cast thy garment about thee, and follow me. Act 12:9 And he went out, and followed him; and wist not that it was true which was done by the angel; but thought he saw a vision. Act 12:10 When they were past the first and the second ward, they came unto the iron gate that leadeth unto the city; which opened to them of his own accord: and they went out, and passed on through one street; and forthwith the angel departed from him. Act 12:11 And when Peter was come to himself, he said, Now I know of a surety, that the Lord hath sent his angel, and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews.

This implies a similarity between the two states in terms of perception and activity. Visions are very real.

Visions may contain a symbolic element in order to direct the individual consciousness.

Act 10:10 And he became very hungry, and would have eaten: but while they made ready, he fell into a trance.

Act 16:9 And a vision appeared to Paul in the night; There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us.

Gen 15:9 And he said unto him, Take me an heifer of three years old, and a she goat of three years old, and a ram of three years old, and a turtledove, and a young pigeon.

Why does the Lord not speak clearly as in say Acts? *Act 18:9 Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision, Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace.* Why not say "Go to Macedonia Paul?" Why show a man beckoning?

Perhaps this is to give a greater sense of awareness and to concentrate the mind more specifically than words alone can. It gives more information than words alone and becomes very personal. Paul's conclusion having seen the Macedonian was that he should go to Macedonia. *Act 16:10 And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavoured to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them.* There was a conviction following the vision. Perhaps also experience of the visionary state helped to rationalise the conclusion.

Paul was never disobedient to the heavenly vision. *Act 26:19 Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision.* As we have seen so far in our examination of visions, there is always a directive or revelation and the meaning is not hidden for long if at all.

Confirmation of meaning is found by a third party or established by some sign or providence. *Act 11:11 And, behold, immediately there were three men already come unto the house where I was, sent from Caesarea unto me. Act 11:12 And the Spirit bade me go with them, nothing doubting. Moreover these six brethren accompanied me, and we entered into the man's house: Act 11:13 And he*

shewed us how he had seen an angel in his house, which stood and said unto him, Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon, whose surname is Peter; Act 11:14 Who shall tell thee words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved.

In other words there is a practical and recognisable meaning to a vision that is realised beyond doubt. There is no question mark as to whether you got the meaning correct or not!

The prophet or seer as he was known in the Old Testament may receive his knowledge by visions and confirm it with signs. *Act 11:27 And in these days came prophets from Jerusalem unto Antioch. Act 11:28 And there stood up one of them named Agabus, and signified by the Spirit that there should be great dearth throughout all the world: which came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar. Act 11:29 Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judaea: Act 11:30 Which also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.* There was little doubt that he was right as events proved it.

Visions are possibly a mark of the spiritual state of God's people.

The decline of Israel at the end of the period of Judges is seen in the state of the priesthood. *1Sa 2:27 And there came a man of God unto Eli, and said unto him, Thus saith the LORD, Did I plainly appear unto the house of thy father, when they were in Egypt in Pharaoh's house? 1Sa 2:28 And did I choose him out of all the tribes of Israel to be my priest, to offer upon mine altar, to burn incense, to wear an ephod before me? and did I give unto the house of thy father all the offerings made by fire of the children of Israel? 1Sa 2:29 Wherefore kick ye at my sacrifice and at mine offering, which I have commanded in my habitation; and honourest thy sons above me, to make yourselves fat with the chiefest of all the offerings of Israel my people?* In such decline visions were rare. *1Sa 3:1 And the child Samuel ministered unto the LORD before Eli. And the word of the LORD was precious in those days; there was no open vision.*

Examples of this decline:

Isa 29:9 Stay yourselves, and wonder; cry ye out, and cry: they are drunken, but not with wine; they stagger, but not with strong drink. Isa 29:10 For the LORD hath poured out upon you the spirit of deep sleep, and hath closed your eyes: the prophets and your rulers, the seers hath he covered. Isa 29:11 And the vision of all is become unto you as the words of a book that is sealed, which men deliver to one that is learned, saying, Read this, I pray thee: and he saith, I cannot; for it is sealed: Isa 29:12 And the book is delivered to him that is not learned, saying, Read this, I pray thee: and he saith, I am not learned.

Lam 2:9 Her gates are sunk into the ground; he hath destroyed and broken her bars: her king and her princes are among the Gentiles: the law is no more; her prophets also find no vision from the LORD.

Mic 3:5 Thus saith the LORD concerning the prophets that make my people err, that bite with their teeth, and cry, Peace; and he that putteth not into their

mouths, they even prepare war against him. Mic 3:6 Therefore night shall be unto you, that ye shall not have a vision; and it shall be dark unto you, that ye shall not divine; and the sun shall go down over the prophets, and the day shall be dark over them.

Eze 7:26 Mischief shall come upon mischief, and rumour shall be upon rumour; then shall they seek a vision of the prophet; but the law shall perish from the priest, and counsel from the ancients.

By contrast times of revival are heralded with visions.

Eze 12:21 And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Eze 12:22 Son of man, what is that proverb that ye have in the land of Israel, saying, The days are prolonged, and every vision faileth? Eze 12:23 Tell them therefore, Thus saith the Lord GOD; I will make this proverb to cease, and they shall no more use it as a proverb in Israel; but say unto them, The days are at hand, and the effect of every vision. Eze 12:24 For there shall be no more any vain vision nor flattering divination within the house of Israel. Eze 12:25 For I am the LORD: I will speak, and the word that I shall speak shall come to pass; it shall be no more prolonged: for in your days, O rebellious house, will I say the word, and will perform it, saith the Lord GOD.

Act 2:17 And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams: Act 2:18 And on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy: Act 2:19 And I will shew wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke: Act 2:20 The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the Lord come: Act 2:21 And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.

We must pause to consider then, where is the “vision” in our own day? Spiritual outpouring involves this activity. It should be a common rather than a rare experience. It is not seeing things for the sake of seeing, but seeing for direction.

It is a very precise form of guidance, dealing with specific issues.

- 1) Clarification of doctrine.
- 2) Revelation of purpose.
- 3) Directives for evangelism.
- 4) Directives for charity.
- 5) Personal guidance.
- 6) Warnings and encouragement. *Act 18:9 Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision, Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace. Act 18:10 For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city.*

Churches today lack direction. Resources are not efficiently targeted and efforts are misapplied. We seek causes through providence rather than revelation.

Until there is a greater abundance of prophecy and visions, we shall I believe in some measure be out of touch with God's purpose for our generation!

Unless we have been told all we need to know already and received enough warnings and consequences.

Visions Part 3.

Summarising so far visions are for;

1. Clarification of doctrine.
2. Revelation of purpose.
3. Directive for actions.
4. Warnings and encouragement.

They were linked with spiritual revival and decline in periods of disobedience.

We may now raise the question as to whether they are normal for the Christian Church, can we expect them? In answer to that we must say that we have no evidence that they are to cease in the church rather that they are a mark of the last days. *Act 2:17 And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams:* They have also been present in all ages from the creation, therefore they are normative.

In the New Testament they are particularly associated with the mission of the church and associated with those who have oversight. The visions of Ananias and Cornelius were not separated from the authority and purpose of God through His ministries because both involved Apostles.

I would therefore see them continuing in this context of directives for the body primarily associated with and through worship.

In this aspect I will distinguish their use from the general expectation of individual and personal guidance.

It is of course right that we as believers should seek personal guidance for decision making.

We hear such phrases as "pray that I will find God's will for such and such", "pray that we will be able to find the Lord's will in this matter", "Lord help us to recognise our calling". In such phrases is the idea that the key to right decision making is the discernment of God's ideal plan. Yet the New Testament does not use such phrases. "Let us pray about it" is often a statement of unwillingness to act or an ignorance of the New Testament method of problem solving. The

phrase "I will wait for the leading of the Spirit". *Rom 8:14 For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. Gal 5:18 But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law.* Law and flesh are doubly contrasted with Spirit, it is not about special guidance. It also highlights the fact that we have a freedom to act that is acceptable to the Lord by the adoption of several options and different options at that. (See Adam's naming of the animals).

For example to marry or not marry?

Is it right or wrong to marry? Can we say that some are wrong if they marry? Do we have to seek more specific guidance or revelation "out of the blue" as it were before we can make that decision? In 1 Corinthians Chapter 7 we are presented with options. On the one hand the statement "good" not to touch a woman occurs, yet "better" to marry than to burn. *1Co 7:1 Now concerning the things whereof ye wrote unto me: It is good for a man not to touch a woman. 1Co 7:9 But if they cannot contain, let them marry: for it is better to marry than to burn.*

Do you expect a vision to get you out of your quandary? If you lust, have unfulfilled sexual desires, burning lusts or fulfil sexual urges before marriage, then there is no need for a vision. You must marry. Putting the onus back to God to parcel up Mr or Miss Right and drop them on your doorstep is to say to God, I am not prepared to take positive action.

In seeking a wife for Abraham's son, the servant actively laid his plan before God. *Gen 24:42 And I came this day unto the well, and said, O LORD God of my master Abraham, if now thou do prosper my way which I go.* In his plan were moral objectives that would, if met fulfil the purpose. He was looking for a particular type of woman, yes he was looking.

The case is analogous to the establishment of a diaconate. A problem arose. *Act 6:1 And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration.* Did they expect a vision for a solution? Was it a matter for immediate prayer? Not at all. The Apostles worked from the position that they already possessed a directive for their action. They had a ministry and they would not be distracted from that calling. *Act 6:2 Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables.* Again as in the previous example, the solution was derived from moral objectives and the choice or freedom of choice was given into the hands of the saints. *Act 6:3 Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business.* That decision would, whatever it amounted to be acceptable to the Apostles.

It is therefore possible to make Godly decisions, decisions that will accord with the will of God, on the basis of a proven moral principle, in other words on the basis of spiritual expediency. What about careers? Can we use the term "vocation or calling", are men called to temporal careers?

A further example is one that we have come across in 1 Corinthians Chapter 6. Problem solving. There is a great reluctance to deal with matters ourselves or to get involved in matters on behalf of others when we have no right to.

The Corinthians also failed to have the direct approach to problem solving. "Let us get a lawyer to do it for us". Basing his argument on the established fact that Christians are God's servants in the final judgement, Paul could see no reason for not acting on that principle in the present age. Time would not make them better judges! He does not say "pray about it, seek a vision from God, let God lead us into His perfect will". The faculty of "wisdom" was present among them to come to a Godly decision. In implementing the moral principles of God we find decisions that are at the heart of His will and they may not always be the same.

In making responsible decisions we must bear in mind that we are accountable. *Rom 14:5 One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind.*

Rom 14:10 But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgement seat of Christ. Rom 14:11 For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God. Rom 14:12 So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God. In Thessalonica Paul makes a decision on expediency for the benefit of the saints.

1Th 3:1 Wherefore when we could no longer forbear, we thought it good to be left at Athens alone; 1Th 3:2 And sent Timotheus, our brother, and minister of God, and our fellowlabourer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you, and to comfort you concerning your faith. It was made on the principle "we thought it best."

His decision to send Epaphroditus back to Philippi was "that he thought it necessary".

Php 2:25 Yet I supposed it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, and companion in labour, and fellowsoldier, but your messenger, and he that ministered to my wants. Php 2:26 For he longed after you all, and was full of heaviness, because that ye had heard that he had been sick.

His decision on accompanying the gift to the believers in Judea was on the basis of "if it is fitting".

1Co 16:3 And when I come, whomsoever ye shall approve by your letters, them will I send to bring your liberality unto Jerusalem. 1Co 16:4 And if it be meet that I go also, they shall go with me.

The decision of the council of Jerusalem was on the basis that it seemed good.

Act 15:28 For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things; Act 15:29 That ye abstain from

meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Fare ye well.

There are therefore areas of life where we have freedom of action and that such actions become endorsed by God on the basis that they are funded from His wisdom.

Wisdom is spiritually opportunistic. *Col 4:5 Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time.* Wisdom redeems opportunity and takes advantage of the situation for the good of the kingdom. *Act 6:3 Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business.*

It is fundamental to solving the common problems of life.

Deu 1:13 Take you wise men, and understanding, and known among your tribes, and I will make them rulers over you.

1Ti 3:2 A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach.

1Ki 3:28 And all Israel heard of the judgement which the king had judged; and they feared the king: for they saw that the wisdom of God was in him, to do judgement.

Eph 5:15 See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, Eph 5:16 Redeeming the time, because the days are evil.

If you expect an overruling guidance, i.e. by vision or prophecy, to supplement your deliberate sloth and wilful ignorance of God's word and His wisdom you are tempting God. If you can go through the week putting your heart and soul into career and family, hobbies and recreation with study relegated to a "spare slot", that doesn't always happen, you are to be rebuked as a lazy, slothful individual. If you bother to find Godly principles, but will not through fear or indifference, implement them you are a disobedient fraud and a Pharisee.

You all made a fuss and scene at your professed conversion, but most of you have now cooled in your ardour. You think that you found out enough to be on the safe side with God, but God is not mocked. Take heed to yourself, make your calling and election sure otherwise you may yet be found among those who cry on the last day "Lord, Lord" and who told you "I knew you not".

Visions Part 4

I want to conclude our study on visions which has developed into a study on revelation in general and personal guidance in particular. In John's gospel, Jesus promised us spiritual guidance.

Joh 16:13 Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come.

He did not promise us infallibility. *Gal 2:11 But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed. Gal 2:12 For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles: but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision. Gal 2:13 And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation.* We tread the path between the two and the question we arrive at is how certain can we be that we are right in our thoughts and actions, because the Holy Spirit does not always overrule and override our actions? If that were true we would be totally free from sin. We would be as Jesus who always did the will of the Father.

Let us try and develop some guidance principles.

1. We must test the source of the prompting or guidance. *1Jn 4:1 Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.* Peter's fallibility as an Apostle was due to the fact that he disregarded what God had already laid down as a principle for action. *Gal 2:14 But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before them all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews?* Paul directs him back to those principles. *Gal 2:15 We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles, Gal 2:16 Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified. Gal 2:17 But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is therefore Christ the minister of sin? God forbid. Gal 2:18 For if I build again the things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor. Gal 2:19 For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God. Gal 2:20 I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me. Gal 2:21 I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain.* Paul was leading Peter back to the will of God.
2. Can you trust feelings or emotions? There is a physiological component to our mental state and we should not neglect this. Peter's physical condition in Gethsemane made him vulnerable. *Mat 26:40 And he cometh unto the disciples, and findeth them asleep, and saith unto Peter, What, could ye not watch with me one hour? Mat 26:41 Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak. Mat 26:42 He went away again the second time, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done. Mat 26:43 And he came and found them asleep again: for their eyes were heavy.* An American football coach for the Green Bay Packers, Vince Lombardi pushed his team hard towards proper physical conditioning. He told them "fatigue makes cowards of us all". Can we regard poor physical conditioning that leads us into sin, as any worse than drunkenness that

leads us into the same sins? Sloth may have its origins in a physical condition and it will bring poverty, spiritual as well as temporal. *Pro 6:6 Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise.* PMS, influenza, late nights and poor physical condition may render our judgements and actions wrong.

- a. Learn to recognise physical symptoms in yourself.
 - b. Exercise greater caution and less haste in arriving at conclusions in such a state.
3. Emotions may be prompted by ungodly desires. Samson sought a woman of the Philistines following the delight of his eyes. *Jdg 14:1 And Samson went down to Timnath, and saw a woman in Timnath of the daughters of the Philistines. Jdg 14:2 And he came up, and told his father and his mother, and said, I have seen a woman in Timnath of the daughters of the Philistines: now therefore get her for me to wife. Jdg 14:3 Then his father and his mother said unto him, Is there never a woman among the daughters of thy brethren, or among all my people, that thou goest to take a wife of the uncircumcised Philistines? And Samson said unto his father, Get her for me; for she pleaseth me well.* For sure God was using it as an occasion against the Philistines, but the end does not justify the means. *Jdg 14:4 But his father and his mother knew not that it was of the LORD, that he sought an occasion against the Philistines: for at that time the Philistines had dominion over Israel. Rom 3:5 But if our unrighteousness commend the righteousness of God, what shall we say? Is God unrighteous who taketh vengeance? (I speak as a man).* Judas appeared to have a good motive for a collection, but it was pre-empted by theft. *Joh 12:4 Then saith one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, which should betray him, Joh 12:5 Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor? Joh 12:6 This he said, not that he cared for the poor; but because he was a thief, and had the bag, and bare what was put therein.* We often reason in our hearts that we are doing this or that because it will be or is of service to God, but in reality we are doing it because it pleases us and we deceive ourselves about our motives.
 - a. Develop personal honesty
 - b. Do not attempt to justify ungodly actions, this will lead to further sin in "the tangled web". *2Sa 12:13 And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the LORD. And Nathan said unto David, The LORD also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die. Deu 11:16 Take heed to yourselves, that your heart be not deceived, and ye turn aside, and serve other gods, and worship them.*
4. Avoid snap decisions if possible, but do not use this as an excuse to avoid coming to an answer. *Deu 17:4 And it be told thee, and thou hast heard of it, and enquired diligently, and, behold, it be true, and the thing certain, that such abomination is wrought in Israel: Deu 17:12 And the man that will do presumptuously, and will not hearken unto the priest that standeth to minister there before the LORD thy God, or unto the judge, even that man shall die: and thou shalt put away the evil from Israel.* I believe that the process of Biblical decision making will improve with the acquisition of Divine knowledge. We shall be better armed and better versed.
5. Dreams. We do not deny that God speaks to men in dreams, but dreams require verification. *Gen 41:15 And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, I have dreamed a dream, and there is none that can interpret it: and I have heard say of thee, that thou canst understand a dream to interpret it. Gen 41:16 And Joseph answered Pharaoh, saying, It is not in me: God shall give*

Pharaoh an answer of peace. The verification process is in at least two parts.

- a. It comes to pass, however this maybe so of a sinful dream. *Gen 41:47 And in the seven plenteous years the earth brought forth by handfuls. Gen 41:53 And the seven years of plenteousness, that was in the land of Egypt, were ended. Deu 13:1 If there arise among you a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, and giveth thee a sign or a wonder.*
 - b. It has a godly, not an ungodly outcome. *Deu 13:2 And the sign or the wonder come to pass, whereof he spake unto thee, saying, Let us go after other gods, which thou hast not known, and let us serve them.* Contrast with Genesis. *Gen 50:20 But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive.*
6. Visions. Visions may have an ungodly source. *Eze 12:24 For there shall be no more any vain vision nor flattering divination within the house of Israel.* From what we have seen of the nature of visions, it is possible to use the faculty of reason in the visionary state to question the source and purpose of it. Avoid people who just “see” things with no understanding and verification in reality. Also question and examine the physical state of the individual at the time of a “seeing” occurrence.

The Lord encourages us to use our Godly reason when confronted with situations. Just “feeling” something is right is no firm basis for action.

If we use terms such as “God told me, the Lord sent me or God required me to do this”, it should not rest on flimsy evidence.

Years ago a friend was looking for his first car. He said “I had a dream about a little blue car. I saw it at work a few days later and recognised it from the dream. This is the one God wants me to have I thought and left to myself I would have bought it and I hasten to add a whole lot of trouble with it! I was saved from the situation by a Christian brother who knew more about cars than I did and having examined it declared it a junk heap. I had to agree with his evidence even though it was with great reluctance as I had set my heart on it. If I had used a reasoned approach to the situation, my emotions would have been tempered and I should have spared myself the conflict.”

In our early Christian lives we are like children are swayed by the flimsiest motives. Paul used this analogy to show that basic human instability. *Eph 4:14 That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive.* Our value judgements are initially very poorly constructed. A young lad received a boat for a present and proudly went off to school to show it to his friends. He came home with a tiny, tatty, dinky car. The “friends” had persuaded him to make the trade. His irate mother corrected the “error”. Beware of those things which defraud you. *Col 2:18 Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind.*

Biblical wisdom which we have shown is spiritually optimistic, is a tool of faith that will temper our vain imaginations. *Jas 1:3 Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. Jas 1:4 But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing. Jas 1:5 If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.*

Paul Proclaims Jesus in Synagogues

We have now been introduced to Paul as I shall refer to him from now. The experience on the Damascus road will be referred to again and again in our scriptures, now we move on to what happened next. Paul has just been visited by Ananias and received his sight back, he is still in Damascus.

Act 9:19 And when he had received meat, he was strengthened. Then was Saul certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus. Act 9:20 And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God. Act 9:21 But all that heard him were amazed, and said; Is not this he that destroyed them which called on this name in Jerusalem, and came hither for that intent, that he might bring them bound unto the chief priests? Act 9:22 But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ.

Clearly Paul's reputation preceded him and people are reluctant to trust him and his message, you can feel trouble is brewing.

Saul Escapes from Damascus

Act 9:23 And after that many days were fulfilled, the Jews took counsel to kill him: Act 9:24 But their laying await was known of Saul. And they watched the gates day and night to kill him. Act 9:25 Then the disciples took him by night, and let him down by the wall in a basket.

Luke makes no mention here of Paul's journey into Arabia, which he tells us himself took place immediately after his conversion, *Gal 1:15 But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, Gal 1:16 To reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood: Gal 1:17 Neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus.*

As soon as God had revealed his Son in him, that he might preach him, he went not up to Jerusalem, to receive instructions from the apostles (as any other convert might have done, that was designed for the ministry), but he went to Arabia, where there was new ground to break up, and where he would have opportunity of teaching, but perhaps not learning, then he returned to

Damascus, and there, three years after his conversion, this happened, which is recorded by Luke.

He met with difficulties at Damascus, and had a narrow escape from being killed there.

What was the danger? The Jews took counsel to kill him, being more enraged at him than at any other of the preachers of the gospel, not only because he was more lively and zealous in his preaching than any of them, but because he had been such a remarkable deserter, and his being a Christian was a testimony against them.

It is said that the Jews watched the gates day and night to kill him, they incensed the governor against him, as a dangerous man, who therefore kept the city with a guard to apprehend him, at his going out or coming in. *2Co 11:32 In Damascus the governor under Aretas the king kept the city of the Damascenes with a garrison, desirous to apprehend me: 2Co 11:33 And through a window in a basket was I let down by the wall, and escaped his hands.*

Now Christ had shown Paul what great things he must suffer for his name (Acts 9:16), when there was a government in arms against him, which was a great thing, and, as all his other sufferings afterwards, helped to make him considerable. Paul was no sooner a Christian than a preacher, no sooner a preacher than a sufferer, so quickly did he rise to the summit of his preferment. Where God gives great grace he commonly exercises it with great trials.

Paul was delivered, the plan against him was discovered. Their lying in wait was known of Paul, by some intelligence, whether from heaven or from men we are not told.

The disciples contrived to help him away and in the night, the gates being watched, so that he could not get away through them, they let him down by the wall, in a basket, as he himself relates it, so he escaped out of their hands.

Saul in Jerusalem

Act 9:26 And when Saul was come to Jerusalem, he assayed to join himself to the disciples: but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple. Act 9:27 But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus. Act 9:28 And he was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem. Act 9:29 And he spake boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus, and disputed against the Grecians: but they went about to slay him. Act 9:30 Which when the brethren knew, they brought him down to Caesarea, and sent him forth to Tarsus. Act 9:31 Then had the churches rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied.

See the scope of the persecution at this time, it affected the whole of Israel.

In Galatians Chapter 1 we hear from Paul himself what happened at this time and

also some additional information about what he did and where he went next!

Gal 1:15 But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, Gal 1:16 To reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood: Gal 1:17 Neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus. Gal 1:18 Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and abode with him fifteen days.

See how wary his friends were of him. When he came to Jerusalem, he did not go to the chief priests and the Pharisees (he had taken his leave of them long since), but he tried to join himself to the disciples. Wherever he came, he owned himself one of that despised persecuted people, and associated with them. They were now in his eyes the excellent ones of the earth, in whom was all his delight. He desired to be acquainted with them, and to be admitted into communion with them, but they looked strangely upon him, perhaps shut the door against him, and would not go about any of their religious exercises if he were by, for they were afraid of him.

Now Paul might be tempted to feel sorry for himself, when the Jews had abandoned and persecuted him, and the Christians would not receive and entertain him. They did not believe that he was a disciple, but thought he only pretended to be so, and came among them as a spy or an informer. They knew what a bitter persecutor he had been, with what fury he went to Damascus some time ago, they had heard nothing of him since, and therefore thought he was but a wolf in sheep's clothing.

The disciples of Christ needed to be cautious whom they admitted into communion with them. Believe not every spirit. There is need of the wisdom of the serpent, to keep the balance between the extremes of suspicion on the one hand and credulity on the other.

This situation is soon resolved. (Acts 9:27), Barnabas took him to the apostles themselves, who were not so scrupulous as the other disciples, to whom he first assayed to join himself, and he declared to them, what Christ had done for him. He had shown himself to him in the way and spoken to him, Barnabas explains what Paul had since done for Christ. He had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus. How Barnabas came to know this, more than the rest of them, we are not told, whether he had himself been at Damascus or discoursed with some of that city, by which he came to the knowledge of this, or whether he had formerly been acquainted with Paul in the Grecian synagogues, or at the feet of Gamaliel, and had such an account of his conversion from himself as he saw cause enough to give credit to, but so it was that, being satisfied himself, he gave satisfaction to the apostles concerning Paul, he having brought no testimonials from the disciples at Damascus, thinking he need not bring epistles of commendation, 2 Cor. 3:1.

Paul was admitted into the communion of the disciples, which was no little provocation to his enemies. It vexed the unbelieving Jews to see Paul a trophy of Christ's victory, and a captive to his grace, who had been such a champion for their cause, to see him coming in, and going out, with the apostles (Acts 9:28), and to hear them glorying in him, or rather glorifying God in him. He appeared

vigorous in the cause of Christ, and this was yet more provoking to them (Acts 9:29): He spoke boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus.

Those that speak for Christ have reason to speak boldly, for they have a good cause, and speak for one who will at last speak for Himself and them too. The Grecians, or Hellenist Jews, were most offended at him, because he had been one of them, and they drew him into a dispute, in which, no doubt, he was too hard for them, as he had been for the Jews at Damascus. Remember the Christian folk who complained earlier about the alms distribution, we might think that the Grecians were of a victim mentality and easily offended.

One of the martyrs apparently said, though she could not dispute for Christ, she could die for Christ, but Paul could do both. Now the Lord Jesus uses the aspects of the strong man in Paul. For that same natural quickness and fervour of spirit which, while he was in ignorance and unbelief, made him a furious bigoted persecutor of the faith, made him a most zealous courageous defender of the faith.

This brought him into peril of his life, with which he narrowly escaped. The Grecians, when they found they could not deal with him in disputes, contrived to silence him another way, they went about to slay him, as they did Stephen when they could not resist the Spirit by which he spoke, Acts 6:10. Notice was given of this conspiracy too, and care taken to secure this young champion (Acts 9:30): When the brethren knew what was designed against him they brought him down to Caesarea. They remembered how the putting of Stephen to death, upon his disputing with the Grecians, had been the beginning of a sore persecution, and therefore were afraid of having such a vein opened again, and hastened to get Paul out of harms way. He that flies may fight again. He that fled from Jerusalem might do service at Tarsus, the place of his nativity. and they desired him by all means to go, hoping he might there go on in his work with more safety than at Jerusalem.

It was also by direction from heaven that he left Jerusalem at this time, as he tells us later himself, that Christ now appeared to him, and ordered him to go quickly out of Jerusalem, for he must be sent to the Gentiles. *Act 22:17 And it came to pass, that, when I was come again to Jerusalem, even while I prayed in the temple, I was in a trance; Act 22:18 And saw him saying unto me, Make haste, and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem: for they will not receive thy testimony concerning me.*

Those by whom God has work to do shall be protected from all the designs of their enemies against them till it be done. Christ's witnesses cannot be slain till they have finished their testimony.

The churches now had a blessed time of liberty and peace (Acts 9:31).

The churches had rest. After a storm comes a calm. Though we can always expect troublesome times, we hope that they will not last. This was a breathing-time that allowed them to prepare themselves for the next encounter. The churches that were already planted were mostly in Judea, Galilee, and Samaria, within the limits of Israel. These were the first Christian churches, where Christ had himself laid the foundation.

They made a good use of this peaceful interval. Instead of growing more secure in the day of their prosperity, they abounded more in their duty, and made use of this tranquillity.

They were edified, were built up in their faith, the more free and constant enjoyment they had of the means of knowledge and grace, the more they increased in knowledge and grace.

They walked in the fear of the Lord. They lived so that all who conversed with them might say, surely the fear of God reigns in those people.

They walked in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were not only faithful, but cheerful, and they stuck to the ways of the Lord, and sang in those ways. The comfort of the Holy Spirit was their consolation. They had access to the comfort of the Holy Spirit, and lived upon that, not only in days of trouble and affliction, but in days of rest and prosperity.

The comforts of the earth, when they had free and full enjoyment of them, could not content them without the comfort of the Holy Spirit. Observe the connection of these two, when they walked in the fear of the Lord, then they walked in the comfort of the Holy Spirit. Those are most likely to walk cheerfully that walk circumspectly.

God blessed them with an increase in number. They were multiplied. Sometimes the church multiplies the more for its being afflicted, as Israel in Egypt, yet if it were always so, the saints of the Most High would be worn out. At other times its rest contributes to its growth, as it enlarges the opportunity of ministers, and invites those in who at first are afraid of suffering. When they walked in the fear of God and his comforts, they were multiplied.

The Content of Paul's Ministry Part 1.

We have seen that Paul is already speaking boldly. I will run ahead in our studies and take time to look at the content of his ministry shown to us. This is a big subject and in three parts.

Paul's sudden turnabout was a cause of consternation to the church. How could a man make so complete a turnaround in so short a time? Surely it was a trick to trap more of the Christians. *Act 9:21 But all that heard him were amazed, and said; Is not this he that destroyed them which called on this name in Jerusalem, and came hither for that intent, that he might bring them bound unto the chief priests?* It is a lesson that we must learn to forgive quickly and totally as God Himself had done. There are no grounds for bitterness or mistrust.

Some time ago it was announced that a convicted IRA terrorist had been released because he had renounced his violence and condemned the path that he had followed. What many reviews and broadcasts failed to reveal, was that the man had become a Christian after having studied the scriptures. He failed to

reconcile his position in the IRA with that of Christ's teaching. Of course we are not saying that people should accept a mere form of words, but when "fruits of repentance" are seen then we must concede to the position.

Little of course is said of the victims. The ex-IRA man wrote to his victims. In most cases there is little one can do, since the person is dead and the victims are the secondary victims or relations and friends. Paul had many victims. How did he deal with their grief?

Compensation and restoration have in our society totally outstripped the Biblical Old Testament values. Exodus suggests a table of standards depending upon status. *Exo 21:28 If an ox gore a man or a woman, that they die: then the ox shall be surely stoned, and his flesh shall not be eaten; but the owner of the ox shall be quit. Exo 21:29 But if the ox were wont to push with his horn in time past, and it hath been testified to his owner, and he hath not kept him in, but that he hath killed a man or a woman; the ox shall be stoned, and his owner also shall be put to death. Exo 21:30 If there be laid on him a sum of money, then he shall give for the ransom of his life whatsoever is laid upon him. Exo 21:31 Whether he have gored a son, or have gored a daughter, according to this judgement shall it be done unto him. Exo 21:32 If the ox shall push a manservant or a maidservant; he shall give unto their master thirty shekels of silver, and the ox shall be stoned. Exo 21:33 And if a man shall open a pit, or if a man shall dig a pit, and not cover it, and an ox or an ass fall therein; Exo 21:34 The owner of the pit shall make it good, and give money unto the owner of them; and the dead beast shall be his. Exo 21:35 And if one man's ox hurt another's, that he die; then they shall sell the live ox, and divide the money of it; and the dead ox also they shall divide. Exo 21:36 Or if it be known that the ox hath used to push in time past, and his owner hath not kept him in; he shall surely pay ox for ox; and the dead shall be his own.* Today compensations are based on such vague terms as expectation, lifestyle, standard of living and quality of life. In reality it comes down to how much your lawyer can screw out of the guilty party.

To what extent can we accept the Old Testament as the basis for our value judgement? In the absence of any clear statements in the New Testament are we right to go into the Old Testament for our standards? I want to see if we can develop a system of ethics from the New Testament and to evaluate Paul's system.

Paul was a "super Jew". Does he appeal to the Old Testament as a basis for New Testament action, if so, to what extent and how? Today there is a growing movement towards what is called Christian reconstruction. At the core of its thinking is the aim of instituting the laws of Israel in society at large, exercising dominion through the application of the law. I am not saying that they are not Christians or that you cannot profit from their literature. However is it a New Testament attitude that they have adopted? Let them state their own position.

We will look in the Journal of Christian reconstruction, dealing with the ministry of Chalcedon and asking what is law?

They have based their concept of law in society as firmly grounded and drawn from the Old Testament. The critics of this movement point out that the New Covenant is not grounded or founded upon the law of Moses. *Heb 10:16 This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them; Heb 10:17 And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more.*

Little is said concerning how they arrive at moral values and rules. It is all very well to criticise, but what alternative do you present?

The Puritans were presented with a practical issue of conducting society and introducing law and order. I shall God willing be going into their approach to the subject.

Now as we said, Paul was a Hebrew of Hebrews. Did he see the Old Testament Mosaic laws, the Jewish laws as something to be imposed upon mankind? No he did not. In this he is not a reconstructionist.

In fact he is accused of undermining the Law of Moses. *Act 21:21 And they are informed of thee, that thou teachest all the Jews which are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children, neither to walk after the customs.* Now you will say, oh he is only talking about the ceremonial law of circumcision. Let me make two points.

- 1) The Scripture speaks of Law, it does not separate ceremonial, civil or moral law. Law is a coherent body of rules.
- 2) Circumcision was the door to national privilege. The national privileges were on the condition of legal obedience. *Deu 28:1 And it shall come to pass, if thou shalt hearken diligently unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe and to do all his commandments which I command thee this day, that the LORD thy God will set thee on high above all nations of the earth: Deu 28:2 And all these blessings shall come on thee, and overtake thee, if thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God.* Hence Paul says that anyone who is circumcised is a debtor to the whole law. *Gal 5:2 Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing. Gal 5:3 For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law.* Consider the implications of putting yourself under law. Does it undermine the work of Christ?

Consequently Paul in rejecting physical circumcision is rejecting the body of Mosaic Law, though I am not saying he is lawless.

The Content of Paul's Ministry Part 2.

There is little evidence in the New Testament that the Christians are encouraged to obtain positions of civil power and having obtained them, employ the Law of

Moses to subdue society. The goal of the New Testament is not to re-establish the community of National Israel. The aim is not to rebuild the Temple and separate themselves from society at large.

Now I am not saying that we or they opt out of civil responsibility, that the world be viewed as a ruin and therefore we leave it to rot. On the contrary, we are a preservative, like salt and an example. *Mat 5:13 Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men. Mat 5:14 Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Mat 5:15 Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Mat 5:16 Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.* But what do we use for our standard, in order to display “upright works”. If there are “upright works” there are also “works of darkness”. How do we make a distinction?

Surely if we can make a distinction, it is because there are rules, principles and laws. But what are they? How are they derived? How do we know that they are just? Do we always in the absence of a clear New Testament directive upon an action fall back on the Old Testament Law of Moses? Is there any principle which would justify that?

What I am trying to do is to establish a general principle from the New Testament that will enable us to regulate our lives in a Godly fashion in all circumstances.

There was a clear shift in New Testament thinking away from the Law of Moses. *Act 15:14 Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. Act 15:15 And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, Act 15:16 After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: Act 15:17 That the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things. Act 15:18 Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world. Act 15:19 Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God: Act 15:20 But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood. Act 15:21 For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day.*

The reconstructionists would have found it hard to sit still. Here was a prime opportunity to bring back Moses and apply the cultural requirements of Israel to the Gentiles. To the contrary, Moses is put out with a few concessions. No Sabbath law is applied to these people, in fact it is put beyond judgement. *Col 2:16 Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: Col 2:17 Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ.*

Despite this, the New England Puritan Community thought fit to introduce Moses' law. Let their own laws speak for themselves. I am quoting the facsimile 1672 and 1685 editions.

The first edition 1672 made Sabbath breaking a capital offence. Page 6 #9 Death penalty. Notice they equate Sabbath with Lord's Day. There is no Biblical ground for this. Page 10 #28 smoking was also banned. Page 42 #5 as was drinking. Clearly the Sabbath required different behaviour. A dual standard is hereby introduced. The New Testament does not hold dual standards. A crime on one day must be a crime on another day.

The Sabbath was no longer a capital offence in the 1685 edition of the laws. Just what had made that change is not clear to me yet. I have a suspicion and will God willing bring that out at a later stage.

The Puritans wanted men to know that if a man was a criminal it would show for life. Branding meant the convicted was marked with letters that stand for their crime, HT for hog thief, A for adulterer. The branding could be on the cheek, forehead, or more mildly on the hand or finger. Page 23 #3 No the B is not for bonus! (Burglar). Page 23 #4 You might get the letter R (robber) and as a special mark of Sabbath breaking you got it in the head.

Page 35 #5 Pubs still remained shut. I imagine that this law was imported from the UK and that explains our old Sunday Licensing laws.

However, despite these comments, the Sabbath had not lost its importance. It had in fact grown into a whole section in its own right. Page 57.

They were clearly influenced in their thinking by the Old Testament, but they had also modified the Old Testament law without any Biblical grounds (i.e. brandings, drinking and death penalty, whippings etc). There are many Christians who have the same ill defined attitude.

If you accept the letter of the law, then you must abide in it without addition or subtraction. *Deu 4:4 But ye that did cleave unto the LORD your God are alive every one of you this day.* It is easily made, as Jesus says void by traditions of men. *Mat 15:5 But ye say, Whosoever shall say to his father or his mother, It is a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; Mat 15:6 And honour not his father or his mother, he shall be free. Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition. Mat 15:7 Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying, Mat 15:8 This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. Mat 15:9 But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.*

So as a principle, I conclude his section by stating that "if you put yourself under law, you must hold it consistently and totally or else a failure in one point alone is total failure. *Jas 2:10 For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.*

The Content of Paul's Ministry Part 3.

The Law of Moses does not distinguish between believer and unbeliever. It addresses the whole nation of Israel as one body.

Exo 20:22 And the LORD said unto Moses, Thus thou shalt say unto the children of Israel, Ye have seen that I have talked with you from heaven.

It imposes a series of external prohibitions or restraints upon the nation, but has no power to make a man righteous.

Gal 2:21 I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain.

Here is another principle enunciated. Laws cannot make a man righteous any more than it can make him honest. It has a restraining effect, to be sure, but it is holding the lid down on a seething mass of corruption. In Christ, there is a freedom not maintained by Law, but by faith working through love.

Gal 3:28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.

Gal 5:1 Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage. Gal 5:6 For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love.

It is a new power, the power of the Holy Spirit to work righteousness by a spiritual rather than a fleshly walk. *Gal 5:18 But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law. Rom 8:1 There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.*

We have therefore to consider what in our lives is fleshly or carnal and what is "spiritual" i.e. of the spirit. I will use the Puritan Laws again to assist us in framing a picture and the subject is drink.

1672 Edition

Page 9 #25-26 They had made an attempt to define the symptoms of drunkenness and made punishments to deter it.

Page 42 #4 They had also reasoned that there was a lingering above necessity which led to drunkenness and they therefore imposed an arbitrary limit of one hour (it is interesting that many people often spend many hours over drink which does little to nourish, but not the same over food which if so would be called gluttony).

Page 42 #6 Inveterate drinkers were marked out and discouraged.

Page 44 #7 Indians who had great appetite and subsequently caused disorder were not to be given the drink.

1685 Edition

The laws had now been drawn together under a complete section called “Inn-Keepers”.

Page 34 #1 The abuse of lawful liberty had incurred a licensing law.

Page 35 #4 Excess, tippling and lingering were condemned.

Page 36 #11 Houses were to be cleared relatively early in the evening.

Page 36 #12 Care was taken with abuse.

Now as a New Testament principle “evil associations corrupt good manners”. *1Co 15:33 Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners.* Places and people will influence our behaviour, we must not therefore tempt providence or abuse liberty.

There are some that we might say 5 minutes drinking is too much, because of their spiritual attitude and behaviour. But we cannot legislate righteousness, as we cannot legislate righteousness, we cannot legislate sobriety, we must encourage ourselves in spiritual principles that we had not considered before.

The Puritan approach is similar to our law of alcohol limitation and driving. It is an average figure and takes no account of individual’s age, capacity, metabolism etc. It also has not stopped the offence of drinking and driving. However you can understand how the Puritans wanted to stop the abuse and sin associated with alcohol.

Now what constraints does the New Testament apply?

- 1) The love of God and the knowledge of His displeasure. *Gal 5:19 Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, Gal 5:20 Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, Gal 5:21 Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.*
- 2) Exhortation and admonition. The man is not marked physically. *2Th 3:14 And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. 2Th 3:15 Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother. 2Th 3:16 Now the Lord of peace himself give you peace always by all means. The Lord be with you all.*
- 3) The love of neighbour. *1Co 10:31 Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God. 1Co 10:32 Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God: 1Co*

10:33 Even as I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved.

- 4) Moderation. *1Co 9:24 Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. 1Co 9:25 And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible. 1Co 9:26 I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: 1Co 9:27 But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.*
- 5) Profitability and edification. *1Co 6:12 All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any. 1Co 10:23 All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not.*
- 6) Excommunication. *1Co 5:11 But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat. 1Co 5:12 For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? do not ye judge them that are within? 1Co 5:13 But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person.*
- 7) Divine retribution. *1Co 10:30 For if I by grace be a partaker, why am I evil spoken of for that for which I give thanks? Act 5:5 And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all them that heard these things.*

There are no vectors applied to the restraints i.e. time allowed, place, quantity, age or day of the week.

The New Testament endeavours to build a healthy conscience rather than a thriving prison.

It is important to see the impact of the Old Testament as the Gentiles were not under this and missed this life style; it did not make them in any way less deserving of Christ and His sacrifice.

The Healing of Aeneas

Act 9:32 And it came to pass, as Peter passed throughout all quarters, he came down also to the saints which dwelt at Lydda. Act 9:33 And there he found a certain man named Aeneas, which had kept his bed eight years, and was sick of the palsy. Act 9:34 And Peter said unto him, Aeneas, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole: arise, and make thy bed. And he arose immediately. Act 9:35 And all that dwelt at Lydda and Saron saw him, and turned to the Lord.

We now see that Peter has left Jerusalem and is travelling south towards Joppa.

He visits the saints that were newly planted by the dispersed preachers. He passed through all quarters. As an apostle, he was not to be the resident pastor of any one church, but the itinerant visitor of many churches, to confirm the doctrine.

He was, like his Master, always upon the move, and went about doing good, but still his head-quarters were at Jerusalem, for there we will later find him imprisoned, Acts 12:2. *He came to the saints at Lydda.* This seems to be the same as Lod, a city in the tribe of Benjamin, mentioned 1 Chron. 8:12; Ezra 2:33. The Christians are called saints, not only some particular eminent ones, but every sincere professor of the faith of Christ. These are the saints on the earth.

The cure Peter wrought on Aeneas, a man that had been bedridden eight years. He was sick of the palsy. Palsy is a medical term which refers to various types of paralysis or paresis, often accompanied by weakness and the loss of feeling and uncontrolled body movements such as shaking. The disease was extreme, for he kept his bed, it was chronic, for he kept his bed eight years, and we may suppose that both he and all about him despaired of relief for him, and concluded that he must still keep his bed till he removed to his grave.

Peter interested Christ in his case, engaged him for his relief, Aeneas, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole. Peter does not pretend to do it himself by any power of his own, but declares it to be Christ's act and deed, directs him to look up to Christ for help, and assures him of an immediate cure not, "He will make thee," but, "He does make thee, whole;" and a perfect cure, "He makes thee whole." He does not express himself by way of prayer to Christ that he would make him whole, but as one having authority from Christ, and that knew His mind, he declares him made whole.

He ordered him to exert himself. Arise and make thy bed. Let none say that because it is Christ that by the power of His grace works all our works in us therefore we have no work, no duty, to do, for, though Jesus Christ makes thee whole, yet thou must arise and make use of the power he gives thee, Arise, and make thy bed, to be to thee no longer a bed of sickness, but a bed of rest.

Power went along with this word, he arose immediately, and no doubt very willingly made his own bed.

This act had a good influence upon many, all that dwelt at Lydda and Saron saw him, and turned to the Lord. We can scarcely think that every individual person in those countries recognised the miracle, and was affected by it, but many, the generality of the people in the town of Lydda and in the country of Saron, or Sharon, a fruitful plain or valley, of which it was foretold, Sharon shall be a fold of flocks, Isa. 65:10.

They all made enquiry into the truth of the miracle, did not overlook it, but saw him that was healed, and saw that it was a miraculous cure that was wrought upon him by the power of Christ, in His name, and with a design to confirm and ratify that doctrine of Christ which was now preached to the world.

They all submitted to the convincing proof and evidence there was in this of the divine origin of the Christian doctrine, and turned to the Lord, to the Lord Jesus. They turned from Judaism to Christianity; they embraced the doctrine of Christ,

and submitted to His ordinances, and turned themselves over to Him to be ruled and taught and saved by Him.

Dorcas Restored to Life

Act 9:36 Now there was at Joppa a certain disciple named Tabitha, which by interpretation is called Dorcas: this woman was full of good works and almsdeeds which she did. Act 9:37 And it came to pass in those days, that she was sick, and died: whom when they had washed, they laid her in an upper chamber. Act 9:38 And forasmuch as Lydda was nigh to Joppa, and the disciples had heard that Peter was there, they sent unto him two men, desiring him that he would not delay to come to them. Act 9:39 Then Peter arose and went with them. When he was come, they brought him into the upper chamber: and all the widows stood by him weeping, and shewing the coats and garments which Dorcas made, while she was with them. Act 9:40 But Peter put them all forth, and kneeled down, and prayed; and turning him to the body said, Tabitha, arise. And she opened her eyes: and when she saw Peter, she sat up. Act 9:41 And he gave her his hand, and lifted her up, and when he had called the saints and widows, presented her alive. Act 9:42 And it was known throughout all Joppa; and many believed in the Lord. Act 9:43 And it came to pass, that he tarried many days in Joppa with one Simon a tanner.

The life, and death, and character of Dorcas also known as Tabitha, on whom a miracle was wrought. She lived at Joppa, a sea-port town in the tribe of Dan, where Jonah took a ship to go to Tarshish, now called Jaffa in Tel Aviv.

Her name was Tabitha, a Hebrew name, the Greek for which is Dorcas, both signifying a doe, or hind, or deer, a pleasant creature. Naphtali is compared to a hind let loose, giving goodly words, and the wife to the kind and tender husband is as the loving hind, and as the pleasant roe, Prov. 5:19.

She was a disciple, one that had embraced the faith of Christ and not only this but was eminent above many for works of charity. She showed her faith by her works, her good works, which she was full of, that is, in which she abounded. Her head was full of cares and contrivances which way she should do good. Her hands were full of good employment, she made a business of doing good, was never idle, having learned to maintain good works. She was as full of good works, as a tree that is full of fruit. Many are full of good words, who are empty and barren in good works; but Tabitha was a great doer, no great talker.

Among other good works, she was remarkable for her alms, deeds, which she did, not only her works of piety, which are good works and the fruits of faith, but works of charity and beneficence, flowing from love for her neighbour. She is commended not only for the alms which she gave, but for the alms deeds which she did. Those that have not funds to give in charity may yet be able to do in charity, working with their hands, or walking with their feet, for the benefit of the poor. She was full of alms deeds, which she made, there is an emphasis upon her doing them, because what her hand found to do of this kind she did with all her might, and persevered in.

Dorcas was removed in the midst of her usefulness. Her friends and those about her did not immediately bury her, as usual, because they were in hopes Peter would come and raise her to life again, but they washed the dead body, according to the custom, which, it is said, was with warm water, which, if there were any life remaining in the body, would recover it, so that this was done to show that she was really and truly dead. They tried all the usual methods to bring her to life, and could not the last cry was uttered. They laid her out in her grave-clothes in an upper chamber, which Dr. Lightfoot thinks was probably the public meeting-room for the believers of that town, and they laid the body there, that Peter, if he would come, might raise her to life the more solemnly in that place.

The request which her Christian friends sent to Peter to come to them with all speed, not to attend the funeral, but, if it might be, to prevent it. Lydda where Peter now was, was close to Joppa, and the disciples at Joppa had heard that Peter was there, and that he had raised Aeneas from a bed of languishing, and therefore they sent him two men, to make the message the more solemn and respectful, desiring him that he would not delay to come to them, not telling him why, lest he should modestly decline coming upon so great an errand as to raise the dead, if they can but get him to them, they will leave it to him. Their friend was dead, and it was too late to send for a physician, but not too late to send for Peter.

Peter arose and went with them. Though they did not tell him what they wanted him for, he was willing to go along with them, believing it was upon some good account or other that he was sent for. Let not faithful ministers grudge being at every body's beck, as far as they have ability, when the apostle Paul made himself the servant of all. *1Co 9:19 For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more.* He found the corpse laid in the upper chamber, and attended by widows, probably such as were in the communion of the church, poor widows, there they were, heartbroken.

What a lovely epitaph, there was in Dorcas that which was truly commendable, and worthy of imitation, done modestly and soberly, purely for the glory of God. The commendation of Tabitha was like her own virtues, not in word, but in deed. Here were no orations and poems inscribed to her memory; but the widows showed the coats and garments which she made for them, and bestowed upon them while she was with them.

It was the comfort of Job, while he lived, that the loins of the poor blessed him, because they were warmed with the fleece of his sheep, Job 31:20. And here it was the credit of Tabitha, when she was dead, that the backs of the widows praised her for the garments which she made them. And those are certainly best praised whose own works praise them in the gates, whether the words of others do or not. It is much more honourable to clothe a company of decrepit widows with needful clothing for night and day, who will pray for their benefactors when they do not see them, than to clothe a company of lazy footmen with rich liveries, who perhaps behind their backs will curse those that clothe them (Eccl. 7:21), and it is what all that are wise and good will take a greater pleasure in, for goodness is true greatness.

See where Tabitha focused much of her charity. Doubtless there were other instances of her alms deeds which she did, but this was now produced, she did,

as it should seem with her own hands, make coats and garments for poor widows, who perhaps with their own labour could make a shift to get their bread, but could not earn enough to buy clothes. And this is an excellent piece of charity, If thou seest the naked, that thou cover him (Isa. 58:7), and not think it enough to say, Be ye warmed, [Jas. 2:15](#), [16](#).

What a grateful sense the poor had of her kindness. They showed the coats, not ashamed to own that they were indebted to her for the clothes on their backs. Those are horribly ungrateful indeed who have kindness shown them and will not make at least an acknowledgment of it, by showing the kindness that is done them, as these widows here did.

Those who receive alms are not obliged so industriously to conceal it, as those are who give alms. When the poor reflect upon the rich as uncharitable and unmerciful, they ought to reflect upon themselves, and consider whether they are not unthankful and ungrateful. Their showing the coats and garments which Dorcas made tended to the praise not only of her charity, but of her industry, according to the character of the virtuous woman, that she lays her hands to the spindle, or at least to the needle, and then stretches out her hand to the poor, and reaches forth her hands to the needy, of what she has worked.

The manner in which she was raised to life. Privately.

Thus Peter declined everything that looked like vainglory and ostentation, they came to see, but he did not come to be seen. He put them all out, that he might with the more freedom pour out his soul before God in prayer upon this occasion, and not be disturbed with their noisy and clamorous lamentations.

By prayer. In his healing Aeneas there was an implied prayer, but in this greater work he addressed himself to God by solemn prayer, Peter with the submission of a servant, who is under direction, and therefore he knelt down and prayed.

By the word, a quickening word, a word which is spirit and life: He turned to the body, which implies that when he prayed he turned away from it. But, when he had prayed, he turned to the body, and spoke, "Tabitha, arise, return to life again." Power went along with this word, and she came to life, opened her eyes which death had closed. Thus, in the raising of dead souls to spiritual life, the first sign of life is the opening of the eyes of the mind, Acts 26:18.

When she saw Peter, she sat up, to show that she was really and truly alive, and he gave her his hand and lifted her up, not as if she laboured under any remaining weakness, but thus he would as it were welcome her to life again, and give her the right hand of fellowship among the living, from whom she had been cut off.

And, lastly, he called the saints and widows, who were all in sorrow for her death, and presented her alive to them, to their great comfort, particularly of the widows, who laid her death much to heart, to them he presented her, as Elijah (1 Kgs. 17:23), and Elisha (2 Kgs. 4:36), and Christ (Luke 7:15), presented the dead sons alive to their mothers. The greatest joy and satisfaction are expressed by life from the dead.

I do wonder what this good woman thought and felt at being called to remain on earth and delay eternity.

What were the effects of this miracle? Many were by it convinced of the truth of the gospel, that this was from heaven, and not of men, and believed in the Lord. The thing was known throughout all Joppa, it would be in every body's mouth quickly, and, it being a town of seafaring men, the notice of it would be the sooner carried thence to other countries, and though some never minded it many were wrought upon by it. This was the design of miracles, to confirm a Divine revelation.

Peter was hereby induced to continue some time in this city. Finding that a door of opportunity was opened for him there, he tarried there many days, till he was sent upon business to another place. He didn't stay in the house of Dorcas, lest he should seem to seek his own glory; but he took up his lodgings with one Simon a tanner, an ordinary tradesman, which is an instance of his condescension and humility, and hereby he has taught us not to mind high things, but to condescend to those of low estate, Rom. 12:16. And, though Peter might seem to be buried in obscurity here in the house of a poor tanner by the seaside, yet hence God fetched him to a noble piece of service, which is recorded in the next, for those that humble themselves shall be exalted.

Peter Stays with Simon, a Tanner.

Act 9:43 And it came to pass, that he tarried many days in Joppa with one Simon a tanner.

I was thinking about this from a Jewish point of view and got quite curious, so follow my thoughts and see if you are as confused.

A tanner is someone whose job is making leather from animal skins.

As a Jew if I touched a dead body of an animal even a clean animal when dead I would be unclean but many examples of using skins are given that are not related to cleanliness.

Gen 3:21 Unto Adam also and to his wife did the LORD God make coats of skins, and clothed them.

Num 4:25 And they shall bear the curtains of the tabernacle, and the tabernacle of the congregation, his covering, and the covering of the badgers' skins that is above upon it, and the hanging for the door of the tabernacle of the congregation,

2Ki 1:8 And they answered him, He was an hairy man, and girt with a girdle of leather about his loins. And he said, It is Elijah the Tishbite.

Mat 3:4 And the same John had his raiment of camel's hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins; and his meat was locusts and wild honey.

My questions are is Simon the Tanner unclean or does the skin perhaps not count as part of the dead animal once removed?

How can John the Baptist ever have been ritually clean while wearing a leather belt around his waist? How can wine in a wineskin be suitable for human consumption? I went back and reread the rules in Leviticus about clean and unclean. I also did some searching around on the Internet, and I learned that we are not the only ones with questions about this topic.

Leviticus 13:47-59 gives specific instructions for how to tell if “anything made of skin” has become unclean, and if so, how to make it clean again. So obviously leather and wineskins made from clean animals are capable of being clean or it couldn’t become unclean.

Lev 13:58 And the garment, either warp, or woof, or whatsoever thing of skin it be, which thou shalt wash, if the plague be departed from them, then it shall be washed the second time, and shall be clean. Lev 13:59 This is the law of the plague of leprosy in a garment of woollen or linen, either in the warp, or woof, or any thing of skins, to pronounce it clean, or to pronounce it unclean.

The rabbinical interpretations of clean/unclean are horrendously complicated, however. For example, one reference I looked at, *The Comparative Hermeneutics of Rabbinic Judaism, Vol. 5, Seder Tohorot*, by Jacob Neusner, has pages and pages on the cleanness or uncleanness of leather. The state of cleanness of leather may depend on, for example, whether a shoe is still on the last or not, the size of the piece of leather, or whether the piece of leather is flat or made into a pouch. In a somewhat spooky anticipation of Schrodinger’s Cat, the mere intention of the person who is working with a leather utensil can make it unclean, without any physical act (Neusner, p. 92). I decided that this is way too complicated for me to understand.

However, the bottom line is this, in particular, leather and skins may be unclean or clean, depending. So wearing leather or drinking from a wineskin may make a person unclean or not, depending.

Maybe if Simon did not kill the animal, but only worked on the skin maybe he was not unclean.

David Guzik comments

He stayed many days in Joppa with Simon, a tanner. This sentence would be somewhat shocking to an observant Jew of that time. According to their understanding of the law, it was strictly forbidden to associate with anyone who routinely worked with dead animals.

- i. According to the laws of that time, a tanner had to live at least 75 feet (25 meters) outside a village because of his constant ritual uncleanness.
- ii. “The trade of a tanner was held in such supreme contempt that if a girl was betrothed to a tanner without knowing that he followed that calling, the betrothal was void.” (Morgan)

He stayed many days in Joppa with Simon, a tanner. Because of this, we see Peter was becoming less concerned about Jewish traditions and ceremonial notions than before. This work of God in Peter's heart laid groundwork for what God would do in Peter in the future.

I think what we can definitely say is that Peter stayed with a tradesman and was not concerned about wealth and status and was happy to live as the common people.

Acts Chapter 10.

Peter and Cornelius

Act 10:1 There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of the band called the Italian band, Act 10:2 A devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway. Act 10:3 He saw in a vision evidently about the ninth hour of the day an angel of God coming in to him, and saying unto him, Cornelius. Act 10:4 And when he looked on him, he was afraid, and said, What is it, Lord? And he said unto him, Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God. Act 10:5 And now send men to Joppa, and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter: Act 10:6 He lodgeth with one Simon a tanner, whose house is by the sea side: he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do. Act 10:7 And when the angel which spake unto Cornelius was departed, he called two of his household servants, and a devout soldier of them that waited on him continually; Act 10:8 And when he had declared all these things unto them, he sent them to Joppa.

Introducing Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian Regiment. Cornelius was an officer in the Roman Army. A patriotic Jew of that day would naturally dislike or even hate him.

It is curious that one of the first Gentiles we hear about Jesus interacting with is a Centurion.

Mat 8:8 The centurion answered and said, Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed. Mat 8:9 For I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me: and I say to this man, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it. Mat 8:10 When Jesus heard it, he marvelled, and said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel. Mat 8:11 And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. Mat 8:12 But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Mat 8:13 And Jesus said unto the centurion, Go thy way; and as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee. And his servant was healed in the selfsame hour.

Other centurions mentioned in the Bible are:

The one at the cross. *Mar 15:39 And when the centurion, which stood over against him, saw that he so cried out, and gave up the ghost, he said, Truly this man was the Son of God.*

It is possible although I found no evidence that these three mentions refer to the same man!

A centurion places bonds upon Paul, and, as Paul objects, immediately seeks the advice of his superior officer.

Act 22:25 And as they bound him with thongs, Paul said unto the centurion that stood by, Is it lawful for you to scourge a man that is a Roman, and uncondemned? Act 22:26 When the centurion heard that, he went and told the chief captain, saying, Take heed what thou doest: for this man is a Roman.

We see two centurions taking Paul to Felix and protecting him from the threatened hostility of the crowd.

Act 23:23 And he called unto him two centurions, saying, Make ready two hundred soldiers to go to Caesarea, and horsemen threescore and ten, and spearmen two hundred, at the third hour of the night;

Finally, Julius was the centurion responsible for taking Paul to Rome. He enacted the mission capably and humanely and became interested in Paul, so much so that he saved him from death at the hands of the soldiers in the hour of threatened shipwreck.

Act 27:1 And when it was determined that we should sail into Italy, they delivered Paul and certain other prisoners unto one named Julius, a centurion of Augustus' band.

Thirty-two such Italian cohorts were stationed in the different provinces of the empire. They were made up of Italian volunteers and were considered the most loyal Roman troops." (Lenski) Because he was such a loyal servant of the oppressors of Israel, almost every patriotic Jewish person of that day would naturally be prejudiced against Cornelius.

It is significant that God spoke to Cornelius directly, even calling him by name. It is also significant that Cornelius responded with a healthy fear of the heavenly and holy (he was afraid). This shows that Cornelius had a real relationship with God.

Send for Simon whose surname is Peter. Possibly, Cornelius didn't even know who Peter was. But he knew that he should do what God told him to do, and he could trust that God was speaking to this one named Peter also (He will tell you what you must do).

We are told that he was a great man and a good man, two characters that seldom meet, but here they did, and where they do meet they put a lustre upon

each other: goodness makes greatness truly valuable, and greatness makes goodness much more serviceable.

Cornelius was an officer of the army. He was at present quartered in Caesarea, a strong city, lately re-edified and fortified by Herod the Great, and called Caesarea in honour of Augustus Caesar. It lies upon the sea-shore, very convenient for the keeping up of a correspondence between Rome and its conquests in those parts.

The Roman governor or proconsul ordinarily resided here, Acts 23:23, 24; 25:6. Here there was a band, or cohort, or regiment, of the Roman army, which probably was the governor's life-guard, and is here called the Italian band, because, that they might be the more sure of their fidelity, they were all native Romans, or Italians. Cornelius had a command in this part of the army. His name, Cornelius was much used among the Romans, among some of the most ancient and noble families. He was an officer of considerable rank and figure, a centurion.

We read of one of that rank in our Saviour's time, of whom he gave a great commendation, Matt. 8:10. When a Gentile must be chosen to receive the gospel first, it is not a Gentile philosopher, much less a Gentile priest (who are bigoted to their notions and worship, and prejudiced against the gospel of Christ), but a Gentile soldier, who is a man of more free thought, and he that truly is so, when the Christian doctrine is fairly set before him, cannot but receive it and bid it welcome. Fishermen, unlearned and ignorant men, were the first of the Jewish converts, but not so of the Gentiles, for the world shall know that the gospel has that in it which may recommend it to men of polite learning and a liberal education, as we have reason to think this centurion was.

Let not soldiers and officers of the army plead that their employment frees them from the restraints which some others are under, and, giving them an opportunity of living more at large, may excuse them if they be not religious, for here was an officer of the army who embraced Christianity, and yet was neither turned out of his place nor turned himself out. And lastly, it was a mortification to the Jews that not only the Gentiles were taken into the church, but that the first who was taken in was an officer of the Roman army, which was to them the abomination of desolation.

He was a religious man. It is a very good character that is given of him, Acts 10:2. He was no idolater, no worshipper of false gods or images, nor allowed himself in any of those immoralities to which the greater part of the Gentile world were given up, to punish them for their idolatry.

He was possessed with a principle of regard to the true and living God. He was a devout man and one that feared God. He believed in one God, the Creator of heaven and earth, and had a reverence for his glory and authority, and a dread of offending him by sin, and, though he was a soldier, it was no diminution to the credit of his valour to tremble before God.

He kept up religion in his family. He feared God with all his house. He would not admit any idolaters under his roof, but took care that not himself only, but all his,

should serve the Lord. Every good man will do what he can that those about him may be good too.

He was a very charitable man. He gave much alms to the people, the people of the Jews, notwithstanding the singularities of their religion. Though he was a Gentile, he was willing to contribute to the relief of one that was a real object of charity, without asking what religion he was of.

He was much in prayer. He prayed to God always. He kept up stated times for prayer, and was constant to them. Wherever the fear of God rules in the heart, it will appear both in works of charity and of piety, and neither will excuse us from the other.

His orders are given to him from heaven, by the ministry of an angel, to send for Peter to come to him, which he would never have done if he had not been thus directed to do it.

See how, these orders were given him. He had a vision, in which an angel delivered them to him. It was about the ninth hour of the day, at three of the clock in the afternoon, which is for us an hour of business and conversation; but then, because it was in the temple the time of offering the evening sacrifice, it was made by devout people an hour of prayer, to intimate that all our prayers are to be offered up in the virtue of the great sacrifice. Cornelius was now at prayer, so he tells us himself, Acts 10:30.

We are told that an angel of God came in to him.

Also that he saw him evidently with his bodily eyes, not in a dream presented to his imagination, but in a vision presented to his sight, for his greater satisfaction, it carried its own evidence along with it.

He called him by his name, Cornelius, to intimate the particular notice God took of him.

This put Cornelius into some confusion (Acts 10:4). When he looked on him he was afraid. The wisest and best men have been struck with fear upon the appearance of any extra-ordinary messenger from heaven, and justly, for sinful man knows that he has no reason to expect any good tidings thence. And therefore Cornelius cries, "What is it, Lord? What is the matter?" This he speaks as one afraid of something amiss, and longing to be eased of that fear, by knowing the truth, or as one desirous to know the mind of God, and ready to comply with it, as Joshua: What saith my Lord unto his servant? And Samuel, Speak, for thy servant heareth.

He is assured that God accepts him in walking according to the light he had. Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God. Prayers and alms must go together. We must follow our prayers with alms, it is not enough to pray that what we have may be sanctified to us, but we must give alms of such things as we have, and then, behold, all things are clean to us, as Jesus said *Luk 11:41 But rather give alms of such things as ye have; and, behold, all things are clean unto you.* And we must follow our alms with our prayers that God would

graciously accept them, and that they may be blessed to those to whom they are given.

Cornelius prayed, and gave alms, not as the Pharisees, to be seen of men, but in sincerity, as unto God, and he is told that they were come up for a memorial before God. They were upon record in heaven, in the book of remembrance that is written there for all that fear God, and shall be remembered to his advantage: "Thy prayers shall be answered, and thine alms recompensed." The sacrifices under the law are said to be for a memorial.

Lev 2:9 And the priest shall take from the meat offering a memorial thereof, and shall burn it upon the altar: it is an offering made by fire, of a sweet savour unto the LORD.

Lev 5:12 Then shall he bring it to the priest, and the priest shall take his handful of it, even a memorial thereof, and burn it on the altar, according to the offerings made by fire unto the LORD: it is a sin offering.

Lev 6:15 And he shall take of it his handful, of the flour of the meat offering, and of the oil thereof, and all the frankincense which is upon the meat offering, and shall burn it upon the altar for a sweet savour, even the memorial of it, unto the LORD.

Prayers and alms are our spiritual offerings, which God is pleased to recognise and remember. What Cornelius did he did in faith and was accepted of God for the Gentiles, were not obliged to become circumcised Jews, as those to whom the gospel of Christ comes are to become baptized Christians. However we do not know if Cornelius was circumcised or not.

He is told to act before being given his next instructions. He must send forthwith to Joppa, and enquire for one Simon Peter, he lodgeth at the house of one Simon a tanner, his house is by the sea side, and, if he is sent for, he will come, and when he comes he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do, this is the answer to the question, What is it, Lord?

Now there are two very surprising things, worthy our consideration. Cornelius prays and gives alms in the fear of God, is religious himself and keeps up religion in his family, and all this so as to be accepted of God in it, and yet there is something further that he ought to do, he ought to embrace the Christian religion, now that God has established it among men. I love this Divine prod to take the next step.

It is not optional, he must do it, it is necessary to his acceptance with God for the future, though he has been accepted in His services up til now. He that believed the promise of the Messiah must now believe the fulfilment of that promise.

Now that God has given a further record concerning His Son than what had been given in the Old-Testament prophecies He requires that we receive this when it is brought to us, and now neither our prayers nor our alms can come up for a memorial before God unless we believe in Jesus Christ, for it is that further which we ought to do. This is His commandment, that we believe. Prayers and alms are accepted from those that believe that the Lord is God, and have not opportunity of knowing more, but, from those to whom it is preached that Jesus is Christ, it is

necessary to the acceptance of their persons, prayers, and alms, that they believe this, and rest upon him alone for acceptance.

Cornelius has an angel from heaven talking to him, but he must not receive the gospel of Christ from this angel, nor be told by him what he ought to do, but all that the angel has to say is, "Send for Peter, and he shall tell thee."

As the former observation puts a mighty honour upon the gospel, so does this upon the gospel ministry, it was not to the highest of angels, but to those who were less than the least of all saints, that this grace was given, to preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ (Eph. 3:8), that the excellency of the power might be of God, and the dignity of an institution of Christ supported. *Heb 2:5 God did not choose angels to rule over the future kingdom about which we are speaking*, but to the Son of man as the sovereign, and the sons of men as His agents and ministers of state, whose terrors shall not make us afraid, nor their hand be heavy upon us, as this angel's now was to Cornelius.

And as it was an honour to the apostle that he must preach that which an angel might not, so it was a further honour that an angel was despatched on purpose from heaven to order him to be sent for. To bring a faithful minister and a willing people together is a work worthy of an angel, and what therefore the greatest of men should be glad to be employed in.

He is immediately obedient to these orders. He sent with all speed to Joppa, to fetch Peter to him. Had he himself only been concerned, he would have gone to Joppa to him. But he had a family, and kinsmen, and friends, a little congregation of them, that could not go with him to Joppa, and therefore he sends for Peter.

As soon as ever the angel which spoke unto him had departed, without dispute or delay, he was obedient to the heavenly vision. He perceived, by what the angel said, he was to have some further work prescribed him, and he longed to have it told him. He made haste, and delayed not, to do this commandment. In any affair wherein our souls are concerned it is good for us not to lose time.

He sent two of his household servants, who all feared God, and a devout soldier, one of those that waited on him continually. This devout centurion had devout soldiers. A little devotion commonly goes a great way with soldiers, but there would be more of it in the soldiers if there were more of it in the commanders. Officers in an army, that have such a great power over the soldiers, as we find the centurion had (Matt. 8:9), have a great opportunity of promoting religion, at least of restraining vice and profaneness, in those under their command, if they would but improve it. When this centurion had to choose some of his soldiers to attend his person, and to be always about him, he chose such of them as were devout, they shall be preferred and countenanced, to encourage others to be so. He went by David's rule. Psa 101:6 Mine eyes shall be upon the faithful of the land, that they may dwell with me: he that walketh in a perfect way, he shall serve me.

He declared all these things unto them, told them of the vision he had, and the orders given him to send for Peter, because Peter's coming was a thing in which they were concerned, for they had souls to save as well as he. Therefore he does not just tell them where to find Peter (which he might have thought it enough to

do), but he tells them on what errand he was to come, that they might act for him.

So in Cornelius we find a man in authority, recognised as a benefactor of the nation and a praying man.

Peter is still in the house of Simon the tanner in Joppa and is asked to go to Caesarea, is the case compelling, why go? Well firstly he is contacted by the military and he is told they are at the door as we will see.

Peter's Vision

Act 10:9 On the morrow, as they went on their journey, and drew nigh unto the city, Peter went up upon the housetop to pray about the sixth hour: Act 10:10 And he became very hungry, and would have eaten: but while they made ready, he fell into a trance, Act 10:11 And saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending unto him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth: Act 10:12 Wherein were all manner of fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air. Act 10:13 And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter; kill, and eat. Act 10:14 But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean. Act 10:15 And the voice spake unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common. Act 10:16 This was done thrice: and the vessel was received up again into heaven. Act 10:17 Now while Peter doubted in himself what this vision which he had seen should mean, behold, the men which were sent from Cornelius had made enquiry for Simon's house, and stood before the gate, Act 10:18 And called, and asked whether Simon, which was surnamed Peter, were lodged there. Act 10:19 While Peter thought on the vision, the Spirit said unto him, Behold, three men seek thee. Act 10:20 Arise therefore, and get thee down, and go with them, doubting nothing: for I have sent them. Act 10:21 Then Peter went down to the men which were sent unto him from Cornelius; and said, Behold, I am he whom ye seek: what is the cause wherefore ye are come? Act 10:22 And they said, Cornelius the centurion, a just man, and one that feareth God, and of good report among all the nation of the Jews, was warned from God by an holy angel to send for thee into his house, and to hear words of thee. Act 10:23 Then called he them in, and lodged them. And on the morrow Peter went away with them, and certain brethren from Joppa accompanied him. Act 10:24 And the morrow after they entered into Caesarea. And Cornelius waited for them, and had called together his kinsmen and near friends. Act 10:25 And as Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him, and fell down at his feet, and worshipped him. Act 10:26 But Peter took him up, saying, Stand up; I myself also am a man. Act 10:27 And as he talked with him, he went in, and found many that were come together. Act 10:28 And he said unto them, Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean. Act 10:29 Therefore came I unto you without gainsaying, as soon as I was sent for: I ask therefore for what intent ye have sent for me? Act 10:30 And Cornelius said, Four days ago I was fasting until this hour; and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house, and, behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing, Act 10:31 And said, Cornelius, thy prayer is heard, and thine

alms are had in remembrance in the sight of God. Act 10:32 Send therefore to Joppa, and call hither Simon, whose surname is Peter; he is lodged in the house of one Simon a tanner by the sea side: who, when he cometh, shall speak unto thee. Act 10:33 Immediately therefore I sent to thee; and thou hast well done that thou art come. Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God.

The circumstances of this vision.

It happened when the messengers sent from Cornelius were near the city. Peter knew nothing of their approach, and they knew nothing of his praying, but He that knew both him and them was preparing things for the interview, and facilitating the end of their negotiation. To all God's plans there is a time, a proper time, and He is pleased often to bring things to the minds of His ministers, which they had not thought of, just then when they have occasion to use them.

It was when Peter went up upon the house top to pray, about noon. Peter was in private prayer, though he had a great deal of public work upon his hands. He prayed about the sixth hour, according to David's example. *Psa 55:16 As for me, I will call upon God; and the LORD shall save me. Psa 55:17 Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray, and cry aloud: and he shall hear my voice.*

From morning to night is too long to be without meat, yet who thinks it is too long to be without prayer?

He prayed upon the house top, for privacy, where he could neither hear nor be heard, and so might avoid both distraction and ostentation. There, upon the roof of the house, he had a full view of the heavens, which might assist his pious adoration of the God he prayed to and there he had also a full view of the city and country, which might assist his compassion for the people he prayed for.

He had this vision immediately after he had prayed, as an answer to his prayer for the spreading of the gospel, and because the ascent of the heart to God in prayer is excellent preparation to receive the discoveries of the Divine grace and favour.

It was when he became very hungry, and was waiting for his dinner, probably he had not eaten that day, though doubtless he had prayed before and now he would have eaten. When he was very hungry, this hunger was a proper inlet to the vision about meats, as Christ's hunger in the wilderness was to Satan's temptation to turn stones into bread.

The vision itself, which was not so straightforward as that to Cornelius, it was more figurative and enigmatical, to make a deeper impression.

He fell into a trance, not of terror, but of contemplation, with which he was so entirely swallowed up as not be aware of external things. He quite lost himself to this world, and so had his mind entirely free for converse with divine things, as Adam when the deep sleep fell upon him. The more clear we get of the world, the more near we get to heaven, whether Peter was now in the body or out of the body he could not himself tell, much less can we as Paul admits. *2Co 12:2 I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot*

tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth ;) such an one caught up to the third heaven. See [Gen. 15:12](#); [Acts 22:17](#).

He saw heaven opened, that he might be sure that his authority to go to Cornelius was indeed from heaven, that it was a Divine light which altered his sentiments, and a Divine power which gave him his commission.

He saw a great sheet full of all manner of living creatures, which descended from heaven, and was let down to him to the earth, that is, to the roof of the house where he now was. Here were not only beasts of the earth, but fowls of the air, which might have flown away, laid at his feet; and not only tame beasts, but wild. There were no fishes of the sea, because there were none of them in particular unclean, whatever had fins and scales were allowed to be eaten.

The net of the gospel encloses all, both bad and good, those that before were clean and unclean.

By this vision we are taught to see all the benefit and service we have from the creatures coming down to us from heaven, it is the gift of God who made them, made them fit for us, and then gave to man a right to them, and dominion over them..

Psa 8:4 What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him? Psa 8:5 For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour. Psa 8:6 Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet: Psa 8:7 All sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field; Psa 8:8 The fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas. Psa 8:9 O LORD our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth! How should it double our comfort in the creatures, and our obligations to serve God in the use of them, to see them let down to us out of heaven!

He was ordered by a voice from heaven to make use of this variety which God had sent him, Rise, Peter, kill and eat, without putting any difference between clean and unclean, take any you want. The distinction of meats which the law made was intended to put a difference between Jew and Gentile, that it might be difficult to them to dine and sup with a Gentile, because they would have that set before them which they were not allowed to eat, and now the taking off of that prohibition was a plain allowance to converse with the Gentiles, and to be free and familiar with them. Now they might fare as they fared, and therefore might eat with them, and be fellow-commoners with them.

Peter stuck to his principles, and would by no means hearken to the motion, though he was hungry. Though hunger will break through stone walls, God's laws should be to us a stronger fence than stone walls, and not so easily broken through. And he will adhere to God's laws, though he has a countermand by a voice from heaven, not knowing at first but that Kill, and eat, was a command of trial whether he would adhere to the more sure word, the written law; and if so his answer had been very good, Not so, Lord.

Temptations to eat forbidden fruit must not be parleyed with, but rejected, we must startle at the thought of it, not so, Lord. The reason he gives is, *"For I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean,* hitherto I have kept my

integrity in this matter, and will still keep it." If God, by his grace, has preserved us from gross sin unto this day, we should use this as an argument with ourselves to abstain from all appearance of evil. So strict were the pious Jews in this matter, that the seven brethren, under Antiochus, choose rather to be tortured to death in the cruellest manner that ever was than to eat swine's flesh, because it was forbidden by the law. The Ballad of Hannah and her Seven Sons tells a story well known from the Apocrypha in 2 Maccabees Chapter 7. During the persecution of the Jews in Syria at the time of Antiochus Epiphanes (d. 163 B.C.E.), the seven sons of Hannah were beaten in an effort to force them to eat swine's flesh and commanded to worship an idol. Each refused, and each in turn was slaughtered. No wonder then that Peter says it with so much pleasure, that his conscience could witness for him that he had never gratified his appetite with any forbidden food.

God again proclaimed the repeal of the law in this case. What God hath cleansed, that call thou not common. He that made the law might alter it when He pleased, and reduce the matter to its first state. God had, for reasons suited to the Old-Testament dispensation, restrained the Jews from eating such and such meats, to which, while that dispensation lasted, they were obliged in conscience to submit, but He has now, for reasons suited to the New-Testament dispensation, taken off that restraint, and set the matter at large, has cleansed that which was before polluted to us. *Gal 5:1 Stand firm therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and don't be entangled again with a yoke of bondage.*

We ought to welcome it as a great mercy that by the gospel of Christ we are freed from the distinction of meats, which was made by the law of Moses, and that now every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, not so much because we gain the use of swine's flesh, hares, rabbits, and other pleasant and wholesome food for our bodies, but chiefly because conscience is hereby freed from a yoke in things of this nature, that we might serve God without fear.

This was done three times. Whether Peter's refusal was repeated the second and third time is not certain, surely it was not, when his objection had the first time received such a satisfactory answer. The trebling of Peter's vision, like the doubling of Pharaoh's dream, was to show that the thing was certain, and engage him to take more notice of it. The instructions given us in the things of God, whether by the ear in the preaching of the word, or by the eye, need to be often repeated. But at last the vessel was received up into heaven.

What Christ did, Peter didn't understand and he had been here before. *Joh 13:6 Then he came to Simon Peter. He said to him, "Lord, do you wash my feet?" Joh 13:7 Jesus answered him, "You don't know what I am doing now, but you will understand later."*

Peter doubted within himself what this vision which he had seen should mean. He had no reason to doubt that it was a heavenly vision, all his doubt was concerning the meaning of it. Christ reveals Himself to His people by degrees, and not all at once, and leaves them to think upon a thing, and debate it to and fro in their own minds, before He clears it up to them. Yet he was made to know presently, for the men who were sent from Cornelius were just now come to the house, and were at the gate enquiring whether Peter lodged there, and by their errand it will be revealed what the meaning of this vision was. God knows what services are before us, and therefore how to prepare us, and we then better

know the meaning of what He has taught us when we find what occasion we have to make use of it.

Act 10:25 And as Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him, and fell down at his feet, and worshipped him. This is strange that the Apostles almost became objects of veneration so early on.

Act 10:28 And he said unto them, Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean.

In the vision only animals were shown, but Peter has clearly used this as a parallel for the Jews and Gentiles and that the Gentiles must not be called unclean, he got the point!

This introduces the fundamental question of the social intercourse between Jews and Gentiles and the admission of Gentiles to the Christian fellowship without circumcision. These questions will be debated later at the Council of Jerusalem, so it is important that we understand the subject.

It is true that the Gentiles who lacked the light of God's word were a "law unto themselves". In the eyes of Israel they were an abomination and to be avoided at all costs because of their contaminating practices. *Lev 18:24 Defile not ye yourselves in any of these things: for in all these the nations are defiled which I cast out before you: Lev 18:25 And the land is defiled: therefore I do visit the iniquity thereof upon it, and the land itself vomiteth out her inhabitants.*

It's the Old Testament moral equivalent of AIDS and it led to a cautious view of outsiders. Yet God had in His purpose planned to encompass all men, or rather men from all nations in the plan of salvation, this is Paul's argument in Romans.

Rom 4:16 Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all, Rom 4:17 (As it is written, I have made thee a father of many nations,) before him whom he believed, even God, who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were.

Clean and Unclean Part 1.

Looking into the net!

Now we will look in some detail into the subject of clean and unclean.

In Cornelius we find a man in authority, recognised as a benefactor of the nation and a praying man. *Act 10:3 He saw in a vision evidently about the ninth hour of the day an angel of God coming in to him, and saying unto him, Cornelius. Act 10:4 And when he looked on him, he was afraid, and said, What is it, Lord? And he said unto him, Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God.* He was what we call a proselyte, one though not born Jewish could enter into a relationship with the people of God.

Other examples of Gentile inclusion in the Kingdom of God are:

Isa 11:10 And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek: and his rest shall be glorious.

Isa 42:6 I the LORD have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles.

Mal 1:11 For from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same my name shall be great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense shall be offered unto my name, and a pure offering: for my name shall be great among the heathen, saith the LORD of hosts.

Luk 2:32 A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel.

Strangers were to be treated graciously and they could enter religious worship. *Lev 19:33 And if a stranger sojourn with thee in your land, ye shall not vex him.* It was acceptable to God if God's terms as laid down in the law were adhered to. Foreigners could hold the Passover on condition of circumcision. *Exo 12:48 And when a stranger shall sojourn with thee, and will keep the passover to the LORD, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near and keep it; and he shall be as one that is born in the land: for no uncircumcised person shall eat thereof.* Judaism was not exclusive, it was evangelical.

There were certain foreign exclusions so as to avoid the corruption of false gods. *Deu 7:1 When the LORD thy God shall bring thee into the land whither thou goest to possess it, and hath cast out many nations before thee, the Hittites, and the Girgashites, and the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and mightier than thou; Deu 7:2 And when the LORD thy God shall deliver them before thee; thou shalt smite them, and utterly destroy them; thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor shew mercy unto them: Deu 7:3 Neither shalt thou make marriages with them; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son. Deu 7:4 For they will turn away thy son from following me, that they may serve other gods: so will the anger of the LORD be kindled against you, and destroy thee suddenly.*

This idea of separation lingers on in Peter although I would suggest that it owes more to Pharisaism than true Biblical Judaism as we will see.

Peter practices what he preaches, even staying and eating with Cornelius was

something the Jews thought made them unclean. Peter has taken this lesson truly to heart.

There is therefore caution in Peter's attitude to Gentiles and it is sad that he cannot grasp from scripture the purpose of God. Yet he acted to receive the Gentiles as he did when replacing the Apostle Judas. *Act 1:15 And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples, and said, (the number of names together were about an hundred and twenty,) Act 1:16 Men and brethren, this scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David spake before concerning Judas, which was guide to them that took Jesus.* Prejudice blunts religious perception.

It is necessary to shake Peter a little harder and to do this the Lord grants him a vision as he waits for a meal. The Lord uses the occasion of his hunger to present a much larger feast than he would ever have considered. It is perhaps similar to a convinced vegetarian being told to go out and have a steak or a teetotaler to be called upon to have scotch. It was on the face of it unthinkable.

Peter rejects the offer, a disobedient act and so the vision is repeated 3 times. *Act 10:14 But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean. Act 10:15 And the voice spake unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common. Act 10:16 This was done thrice: and the vessel was received up again into heaven.* Let us examine its significance and draw some applications for our own day.

Rise, Peter, kill and eat. This obviously went against Peter's commitment as a Jew, which was to never eat anything except kosher foods. Certainly, among the all kinds of four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds of the air there were non-kosher animals included.

Not so, Lord! Peter's response was both absurd and yet typical of us. He said "no" to his Lord. The only legitimate answer to a request from our Lord is "yes."

Peter had a bad habit of telling Jesus "no" (Matthew 16:22, John 13:8). Compare Peter's response to God (Not so, Lord!) with Cornelius' response to God (What is it, Lord?). On that day, it seemed that Cornelius was more responsive to God than Peter was.

Peter had pretty much put God in a box of limitations, and now God was going to shake Peter up to change his thinking. He can do the same for us. "Shake yourself up a little, my brother. If you are too precise may the Lord set you on fire, and consume your bonds of red tape! If you have become so improperly proper that you cannot commit a proper impropriety, then pray God to help you be less proper, for there are many who will never be saved by your instrumentality while you study propriety." (Spurgeon)

Peter was saved, Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit, and Peter had been greatly used by God. At the same time, Peter was still Peter. God didn't use him because he was perfect, but because he was in the right direction and he was available. We often fall into the trap of thinking that we must be perfected before God can really use us.

And a voice spoke to him again the second time. God responded clearly to Peter. What God has cleansed (declared clean) you must not call common (impure, unholy, unacceptable to God).

In Old Testament thinking, there was the holy and the common. The holy was made common when it came into contact with something common, and could only be made holy again through a ritual cleansing. When something was made holy it was called consecration, when it was made common it was called desecration.

At this point, Peter believed that God spoke only about food. But shortly, God showed Peter that He was really getting at another point.

This was done three times. For deep emphasis, God repeated this vision three times. Peter was to regard this as important.

By the time the drama had been acted out the third time, Peter must have begun to get the idea that God was trying to tell him something, even though he did not know exactly what it was.

The Greek word for clean has come down into our language as catharsis, a cleaning process.

In the Gospels it is applied to spirits and devils and we have power over them in Christ, they can be commanded.

Mat 10:1 And when he had called unto him his twelve disciples, he gave them power against unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease. Luk 4:33 And in the synagogue there was a man, which had a spirit of an unclean devil, and cried out with a loud voice,

Luk 4:36 And they were all amazed, and spake among themselves, saying, What a word is this! for with authority and power he commandeth the unclean spirits, and they come out.

In the Old Testament it is applied to animals in creation.

Gen 9:5 And surely your blood of your lives will I require; at the hand of every beast will I require it, and at the hand of man; at the hand of every man's brother will I require the life of man. Deu 14:3 Thou shalt not eat any abominable thing.

Deu 14:4 These are the beasts which ye shall eat: the ox, the sheep, and the goat, Deu 14:5 The hart, and the roebuck, and the fallow deer, and the wild goat, and the pygarg, and the wild ox, and the chamois. Deu 14:6 And every beast that parteth the hoof, and cleaveth the cleft into two claws, and cheweth the cud among the beasts, that ye shall eat. Deu 14:7 Nevertheless these ye shall not eat of them that chew the cud, or of them that divide the cloven hoof; as the camel, and the hare, and the coney: for they chew the cud, but divide not the hoof; therefore they are unclean unto you. Deu 14:8 And the swine, because it divideth the hoof, yet cheweth not the cud, it is unclean unto you: ye shall not eat of their flesh, nor touch their dead carcase. Deu 14:9 These ye shall eat of all that are in the waters: all that have fins and scales shall ye eat: Deu 14:10 And

whatsoever hath not fins and scales ye may not eat; it is unclean unto you. Deu 14:11 Of all clean birds ye shall eat. Deu 14:12 But these are they of which ye shall not eat: the eagle, and the ossifrage, and the ospray, Deu 14:13 And the glade, and the kite, and the vulture after his kind, Deu 14:14 And every raven after his kind, Deu 14:15 And the owl, and the night hawk, and the cuckow, and the hawk after his kind, Deu 14:16 The little owl, and the great owl, and the swan, Deu 14:17 And the pelican, and the gier eagle, and the cormorant, Deu 14:18 And the stork, and the heron after her kind, and the lapwing, and the bat. Deu 14:19 And every creeping thing that flieth is unclean unto you: they shall not be eaten. Deu 14:20 But of all clean fowls ye may eat. Deu 14:21 Ye shall not eat of any thing that dieth of itself: thou shalt give it unto the stranger that is in thy gates, that he may eat it; or thou mayest sell it unto an alien: for thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God. Thou shalt not seethe a kid in his mother's milk.

I believe that there is a general principle that will allow you to make a rapid assessment of all creatures without immediate reference to scripture. It is much easier to use a set of principles than remember a string of worked examples.

There are further questions that arise concerning the concept of clean and unclean in the Old Testament.

1. How does it relate to the question of sin?
2. Did the animals sin to become unclean?
3. How could God call the creation "good" when it was created with the forms that declared the concept of clean and unclean? There is no evidence of a change of form when Adam fell.
4. How could God change the rules again as in Acts Chapter 10?

One thing is certain though, for the Old Testament Jew. He had to look closely at life to make sure that he did not offend his God. If he or you loved God it would require considerable effort to be "void of offence to God".

Care in detail was a mark of Old Testament Christianity as much as the new. *Luk 16:10 He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much.*

It translates into practical matters, a lovely example concerns Jeremiah and the Eunuch. *Jer 38:12 And Ebedmelech the Ethiopian said unto Jeremiah, Put now these old cast clouts and rotten rags under thine armholes under the cords. And Jeremiah did so.*

A wise man looks closely and he discerns the work of God in creation.

1Ki 4:29 And God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding exceeding much, and largeness of heart, even as the sand that is on the sea shore. 1Ki 4:30 And Solomon's wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the children of the east country, and all the wisdom of Egypt. 1Ki 4:31 For he was wiser than all men; than Ethan the Ezrahite, and Heman, and Chalcol, and Darda, the sons of Mahol: and his

fame was in all nations round about. 1Ki 4:32 And he spake three thousand proverbs: and his songs were a thousand and five. 1Ki 4:33 And he spake of trees, from the cedar tree that is in Lebanon even unto the hyssop that springeth out of the wall: he spake also of beasts, and of fowl, and of creeping things, and of fishes. 1Ki 4:34 And there came of all people to hear the wisdom of Solomon, from all kings of the earth, which had heard of his wisdom. He is interested in the things that come from God's hands, it is essential for his personal salvation, awareness is crucial. Negligence can cost you eternity. *Rom 13:11 And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed.*

We shall come back to the Old Testament concepts of clean and unclean, but let us close with some New Testament concepts.

In Romans Paul warns us to be careful for other people's sensitivities. *Rom 14:14 I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself: but to him that esteemeth any thing to be unclean, to him it is unclean.* In the context of the passage he is using clean and unclean in respect to food, he is not saying that if somebody is into pornography, wife swapping, homosexuality or paedophilia that it is "clean" if they feel it so or that if it feels good do it and if you have no conscience it doesn't matter. Also he is not saying that the person who views food in the categories of clean and unclean is correct.

There is however a moral uncleanness and I believe that it has reference to our sexual morals. *Rom 1:24 Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves.* The message is that when we shut out God, He doesn't merely shut us out, He gives us a push in the opposite direction. We go from filth to filth. Thus in Ephesians uncleanness is the substance between two slices of fornication and unbridled lust. *Eph 5:3 But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints.*

Uncleanness is also linked with idolatry. *2Co 6:15 And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? 2Co 6:16 And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. 2Co 6:17 Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, 2Co 6:18 And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.* Idolatry is by definition putting objects of desire on a higher level than God. Thus children can be idols just as much as possessions, fashion, sport and recreation. You can serve all of these with more fervour and dedication than you serve God. Not only that, you may drive yourself to serve these idols more than God. If so then we are unclean.

We don't like to admit it, yet in the Old Testament you had to warn others of your condition. *Lev 13:45 And the leper in whom the plague is, his clothes shall be rent, and his head bare, and he shall put a covering upon his upper lip, and shall cry, Unclean, unclean. Lev 13:46 All the days wherein the plague shall be in*

him he shall be defiled; he is unclean: he shall dwell alone; without the camp shall his habitation be. You had to shout it out so that they would not themselves be contaminated by you. Thank God for His promise that if you are an unclean person, sinner or saved while you breathe there is hope. *1Jn 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

If you deny you are a sinner, you have made God a liar and you prove His word is not in you.

Clean and Unclean Part 2.

We left four questions unanswered, we shall endeavour to answer them here.

The creation was good and within its structure and design were differences in form and shape.

Gen 1:24 And God said, Let the earth bring forth the living creature after his kind, cattle, and creeping thing, and beast of the earth after his kind: and it was so. Gen 1:25 And God made the beast of the earth after his kind, and cattle after their kind, and every thing that creepeth upon the earth after his kind: and God saw that it was good.

These differences were clearly placed there for moral instruction, since they make a statement of moral distinction between clean and unclean. This teaches us that in framing the world God was indeed mindful of man. *Psa 8:3 When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; Psa 8:4 What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?*

I will suggest that the creation was built around man, rather than man added to the creation as an afterthought. Scientists have come to admit latterly, that the conditions and events that would lead to the evolution of man are so unlikely that they have coined the term anthropic universe. It is as if the universe in their minds was so regulated that man was an inevitability because the odds were so great that no random events could produce man, therefore man was an inevitability.

We believe that man is central because we have God's word. *Col 1:15 Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: Col 1:16 For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: Col 1:17 And he is before all things, and by him all things consist. Col 1:18 And he is the head of the body, the church:*

who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence.

Man was not an arbitrary evolution from creation, rather creation was structured around man and when I say man I mean man in his most perfect form that is Christ. It is His universe and it will serve Him and reflect His glory.

Creation also speaks to man about his moral duties and if only we had the mind of the Spirit of God we should hear it screaming instruction at us. *Pro 6:6 Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise: Pro 6:7 Which having no guide, overseer, or ruler, Pro 6:8 Provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest.*

Creatures were not inherently sinful, good, evil they were as they issue from the hands of a perfect creator, good in respect of manufacture. They remained unchanged by the fall.

What makes them clean and unclean to man is that God declares them to be so, the law that God sets up makes the difference.

An old man had some precision engineering gauges from his apprentice days, he forbade his son to touch them. Sweaty, careless, clumsy unskilled hands were not allowed near them. And so he used to sneak into his garage and rifle through the forbidden instruments and end up suffering for it!

1. This rule was protective of bona fide users. The equipment remained in good condition and example of stewardship.
2. It was a test of obedience.
3. Although it seemed so, it was not arbitrary.
4. At the right time it could be rescinded.

The grandson now owns the micrometers!

In creating the animals and declaring them unclean, God was not saying that some creatures were sinful and others not sinful. We do not equate clean with righteous and unclean with sinful. God made these distinctions to educate and refine the spiritual sensitivities in man. As a father, He would test their care and obedience and this in turn would be a measure of their love (if you love Me...). God could at anytime revoke and remove these rules, when He considered fit.

This does not mean that God has changed, rather it would be man who changed and no longer required these restrictions.

Heb 9:6 Now when these things were thus ordained, the priests went always into the first tabernacle, accomplishing the service of God. Heb 9:7 But into the second went the high priest alone once every year, not without blood, which he offered for himself, and for the errors of the people: Heb 9:8 The Holy Ghost this signifying, that the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest, while

as the first tabernacle was yet standing: Heb 9:9 Which was a figure for the time then present, in which were offered both gifts and sacrifices, that could not make him that did the service perfect, as pertaining to the conscience; Heb 9:10 Which stood only in meats and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances, imposed on them until the time of reformation. Heb 9:11 But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; Heb 9:12 Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us.

The same principle of change was instituted in respect of the 7th Command where the concession was based upon the nature of man.

Mat 19:8 He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so.

God eventually swept the whole Jewish system away.

Heb 10:1 For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect.

The “new heart” that God gives us is exercised in true righteousness by the indwelling of the Spirit of God. *Joh 14:26 But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.* It does not need to rely upon external forms to remind it of duty and in Acts Chapter 10 the giving of the spirit and the removal of ritual are clearly associated.

Turning back to the subject of clean and unclean, what are the basic rules?

1. Creatures are unclean in their death, touching and eating the corpse was forbidden. *Lev 11:8 Of their flesh shall ye not eat, and their carcase shall ye not touch; they are unclean to you. Lev 11:24 And for these ye shall be unclean: whosoever toucheth the carcase of them shall be unclean until the even.*
2. Distinction based upon locomotion. *Lev 11:3 Whatsoever parteth the hoof, and is clovenfooted, and cheweth the cud, among the beasts, that shall ye eat. Lev 11:21 Yet these may ye eat of every flying creeping thing that goeth upon all four, which have legs above their feet, to leap withal upon the earth.*
3. Distinction based upon diet, vegetarian. *Lev 11:3 Whatsoever parteth the hoof, and is clovenfooted, and cheweth the cud, among the beasts, that shall ye eat. Lev 11:19 And the stork, the heron after her kind, and the lapwing, and the bat.* Note man was vegetarian in the beginning, meat offerings were for the Lord alone and prefigured the sin offering. *Gen 1:29 And God said, Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat. Gen 4:4 And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the LORD had respect unto Abel and to his offering.* However this does not mean

that vegetarianism is morally better than carnivores or vice versa. See Romans Chapter 14.

4. Skin, fins and scales. Smooth skin is an abomination. *Lev 11:9 These shall ye eat of all that are in the waters: whatsoever hath fins and scales in the waters, in the seas, and in the rivers, them shall ye eat.*

Clean and Unclean Part 3.

Peter's spiritual lesson on the state of clean and unclean animals was a lesson also on the state of mankind. The laws of the clean and unclean animals were outlined in Leviticus Chapter 11 and Deuteronomy Chapter 14.

I also suggested that as a single principle to enable us to discern all creatures, we should see in what manner they resemble us and in what manner they are dissimilar from us. Those who have a similarity are unclean (webbed feet/hands, smooth skin, unclean feeders) and by this man was being taught his condition before God, man is unclean and alienated from God. This idea that the animals were a lesson to man is established here in Acts Chapter 10 where Peter is shown the new state that exists when the distinction of clean and unclean is removed. The lesson to man was taught through the animals!

Now we may think that the subject matter of the Old Testament is of little relevance to the New Testament believer. Since Christ not Moses holds sway in our lives we might consider that the Old Testament is no longer valid as a source of spiritual teaching. Moreover many have gone so far as to separate the writings of the two covenants.

However, the new is latent in the old, the old is patent in the new. This is proven where parallels in the Old Testament are made with the new. *1Co 10:6 Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted. 1Co 10:7 Neither be ye idolaters, as were some of them; as it is written, The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play. 1Co 10:8 Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand. 1Co 10:9 Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents. Heb 4:11 Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief.*

Thus we may find Christian instruction in Leviticus, not only concerned types, symbols and figures of Christ the saviour but of the condition of mankind.

Continuing from Leviticus Chapter 11 into Leviticus Chapter 12 we find the case of the woman and childbirth (Hohoroth - uncleanness).

From the point of view of ritual separation for uncleanness, childbirth differed little from menstruation. *Lev 12:2 Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, If a woman have conceived seed, and born a man child: then she shall be unclean seven days; according to the days of the separation for her infirmity shall she be*

unclean. Lev 15:19 And if a woman have an issue, and her issue in her flesh be blood, she shall be put apart seven days: and whosoever toucheth her shall be unclean until the even. Lev 15:20 And every thing that she lieth upon in her separation shall be unclean: every thing also that she sitteth upon shall be unclean. Lev 15:21 And whosoever toucheth her bed shall wash his clothes, and bathe himself in water, and be unclean until the even. Lev 15:22 And whosoever toucheth any thing that she sat upon shall wash his clothes, and bathe himself in water, and be unclean until the even. Lev 15:23 And if it be on her bed, or on any thing whereon she sitteth, when he toucheth it, he shall be unclean until the even. Lev 15:24 And if any man lie with her at all, and her flowers be upon him, he shall be unclean seven days; and all the bed whereon he lieth shall be unclean.

It also was for her the denial of the privileges of the sanctuary and close fellowship with those she loved, would you care for 12 years of this?

Mat 9:20 And, behold, a woman, which was diseased with an issue of blood twelve years, came behind him, and touched the hem of his garment:

Mar 5:25 And a certain woman, which had an issue of blood twelve years, Mar 5:26 And had suffered many things of many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was nothing bettered, but rather grew worse, Mar 5:27 When she had heard of Jesus, came in the press behind, and touched his garment. Mar 5:28 For she said, If I may touch but his clothes, I shall be whole. Mar 5:29 And straightway the fountain of her blood was dried up; and she felt in her body that she was healed of that plague. It was a time of being in the wilderness and the loneliness that accompanies that, she must have felt a million miles from God. She couldn't go to church.

Now I believe that this earthly teaching is invalid for the New Testament since Moses and the law was not imposed upon the New Testament Gentile church (Acts Chapter 15) so the sisters may breathe sign of relief, although those in the Church of England will see it retained in the churching of women. So rejoice in your freedom and meditate upon your sisters of older times.

There are however deep principles that abide and lessons we can learn. In the lessons of clean and unclean, God teaches:

1. It turns Him away when He sees it. Deuteronomy Chapter 23
2. He has a refuge in clean places. *Jos 22:19 Notwithstanding, if the land of your possession be unclean, then pass ye over unto the land of the possession of the LORD, wherein the LORD'S tabernacle dwelleth, and take possession among us: but rebel not against the LORD, nor rebel against us, in building you an altar beside the altar of the LORD our God.*

Of course He has removed the Old Testament symbols of uncleanness, but still He hates sin, uncleanness and unholiness. The laws of clean and unclean are all about what to touch, what to avoid in other words about holiness.

Lev 22:32 Neither shall ye profane my holy name; but I will be hallowed among the children of Israel: I am the LORD which hallow you.

It is still a requirement of the New Testament.

Rom 6:19 I speak after the manner of men because of the infirmity of your flesh: for as ye have yielded your members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity; even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness. Rom 6:22 But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life.

2Co 7:1 Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

1Th 4:7 For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness.

We manifest this holiness in the degree to which we draw back from the things of this world that defile us. *2Co 6:17 Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you.* This is not an injunction to become monks, hermits or separatist. It is not an injunction to develop the old tendencies of self righteousness as the Pharisees. It is a warning to watch how we go, because it is easy to become defiled. Just as people “contracted” defilement in the Old Testament and incurred separation from God so can the New Testament Christian.

Contractual defilement is taught clearly in the book of Haggai. *Hag 2:13 Then said Haggai, If one that is unclean by a dead body touch any of these, shall it be unclean? And the priests answered and said, It shall be unclean.* Summed up it says “if you walk in a pigsty you will get muck on your boots” and that while you can contract uncleanness you cannot contract cleanness. Going to church with Christians does not make you clean.

The church as a body must recognise the elements outside and within that compromise, defile and blacken her witness. It is not the job of the ministers alone, it is a task upon us all. In many churches today discipline is a dirty word. It is thought better to tolerate and allow differences as a mark of Christian charity. It is not. It is, if allowed debilitating and defiling.

Neither is it Christian to say I will let God deal with that matter in the church, I will leave it all in the hands of God. *1Co 5:12 For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? do not ye judge them that are within? 1Co 5:13 But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person.* They didn't in the New Testament!!

The church cleanses herself as a duty, however unpleasant or distasteful it seems.

Tit 3:11 Knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself.

2Th 3:6 Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us. 2Th 3:7 For yourselves know how ye ought to follow us: for we behaved not ourselves disorderly among you; 2Th 3:8 Neither did we eat any man's bread for nought; but wrought with labour and travail night and day, that we might not be chargeable to any of you: 2Th 3:9 Not because we have not power, but to make ourselves an ensample unto you to follow us. 2Th 3:10 For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat. 2Th 3:11 For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies. 2Th 3:12 Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread. 2Th 3:13 But ye, brethren, be not weary in well doing. 2Th 3:14 And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. 2Th 3:15 Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.

1Co 5:5 To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. Conduct not faith is on trial.

2Ti 2:19 Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity.

The church, like the woman in childbirth and the menstruous woman, should see that her relationship to God can be seriously affected by the attitudes she develops, the things she touches and the teachings she tolerates.

Question 1. What was the source of the contamination in Leviticus Chapter 12 for the woman? The blood as in *Lev 15:19 And if a woman have an issue, and her issue in her flesh be blood, she shall be put apart seven days: and whosoever toucheth her shall be unclean until the even.*

Question 2. Why was it different for a boy and a girl? Particularly because sin is transmitted through the male seed.

The reason given by some Jewish writers, suggests, that a male infant circumcised on the eighth day, by the profusion of its own blood, bears part of the purgation, wherefore the mother, for the birth of a female, must suffer twice the time of separation, the separation is finished within two weeks, but the purgation continues, a male child satisfies the law together, and at once, by circumcision; but an adult female bears both the purgation and separation every month. According to Hippocrates, the purgation of a new mother, after the birth of a female, is forty two days, and after the birth of a male thirty days, so that it should seem there is something in nature which requires a longer time for purifying after the one than after the other, and which may in part be regarded by this law; but it chiefly depends upon the sovereign will of the lawgiver.

Question 3. How did a woman enter the covenant? Perhaps through the man as the man is head of women or perhaps the covenant is only with the man? Thanks to Jesus all are welcome.

Rom 2:25 For circumcision verily profiteth, if thou keep the law: but if thou be a breaker of the law, thy circumcision is made uncircumcision. Rom 2:26 Therefore if the uncircumcision keep the righteousness of the law, shall not his uncircumcision be counted for circumcision? Rom 2:27 And shall not uncircumcision which is by nature, if it fulfil the law, judge thee, who by the letter and circumcision dost transgress the law? Rom 2:28 For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: Rom 2:29 But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.

Back to Peters Lesson.

God makes Peter aware of the arrival of the messengers from Cornelius.

Now while Peter wondered within himself what this vision which he had seen meant, behold, the men who had been sent from Cornelius had made inquiry for Simon's house, and stood before the gate. And they called and asked whether Simon, whose surname was Peter, was lodging there. While Peter thought about the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Behold, three men are seeking you. Arise therefore, go down and go with them, doubting nothing, for I have sent them."

When the vision ended, Peter did not have it all figured out. That came in time, and it came as God spoke to Peter through the visitors just arriving at his door.

Previously, in Acts 10:13 and 10:15, it was simply said that a voice spoke to Peter. Now, we are told that the Spirit spoke to Peter. This was God, in the person of the Holy Spirit, speaking to Peter.

At this point, God has not told Peter that his visitors were Gentiles. Normally, a godly Jew like Peter would not associate in this manner with Gentiles. Knowing this, and knowing Peter's previous resistance (Not so, Lord!), God simply surprised Peter with the knowledge that these men were Gentiles. All Peter needed to know was that the Spirit said, "I have sent them."

Peter must have been shocked when he opened the door and saw two servants and a soldier at his door. He would have known immediately that they were not Jews, and he would have wondered why God told him to go with them and why God had sent them.

The idea that God could send and use Gentiles was entirely new to Peter. God was expanding Peter's mind and heart.

The messengers from Cornelius came with an invitation. Peter was to go to the house of Cornelius, who wanted to hear words from you. Of course, this was an invitation Peter couldn't pass up or could he?

A Gentile, worse still, an officer in the Roman army, wanted to hear the gospel from Peter. Peter never did anything like this before! How will he respond?

Then he invited them in and lodged them. This is a bit cheeky to me, imagine if your house guest invites a number of strangers to stay as well. We can see the change in Peter's heart by the way he invited them in and lodged them. Lodged them is literally "to entertain as a guest." Peter didn't just coldly give these Gentiles visitors a room, he entertained them as welcome guests, and he did this against every custom of the Jewish people of that day.

"Normally a Jew would have said, 'Well, it is nice to meet you, but we need to stay out here in the street. You can't come inside.' Or he might have said, 'If you go down the street a little way, I think you'll find an inn where you can stay.' No orthodox Jew would have invited Gentiles into his house. He would not have sat down at the same table with them. He would not have had fellowship with them. It was forbidden." (Boice)

By entertaining these Gentile guests, Peter went against the customs and traditions of Israel, but not against God's Word. Possibly, at this very moment, God flooded Peter's heart with an understanding that though the Old Testament said God's people were not to become like their pagan neighbours, it also said God wanted His people to become a light to their neighbours who didn't know the true God.

On the next day Peter went away with them. Peter reacted out in love to his Gentile neighbours, in obedience to what God told him to do.

The Meeting Between Cornelius and Peter.

Peter arrives at Cornelius' house.

And the following day they entered Caesarea. Now Cornelius was waiting for them, and had called together his relatives and close friends. As Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshiped him. But Peter lifted him up, saying, "Stand up; I myself am also a man."

Cornelius was waiting for them. Cornelius had a lot of faith in God. He waited for Peter to come, knowing that since God motivated him to call Peter in the first place, God would bring the plan to completion.

Cornelius sent servants to get a man he had never met, so that he could meet this unknown man. He only knew that the man was a pious Jew, who by tradition would have nothing to do with a Gentile such as Cornelius. Despite all that, Cornelius was waiting for them in faith.

Gentiles Hear the Good News

Act 10:34 Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: Act 10:35 But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him. Act 10:36 The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ: (he is Lord of all:) Act 10:37 That word, I say, ye know, which was published throughout all Judaea, and began from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached; Act 10:38 How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him. Act 10:39 And we are witnesses of all things which he did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree: Act 10:40 Him God raised up the third day, and shewed him openly; Act 10:41 Not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead. Act 10:42 And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead. Act 10:43 To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.

We have here Peter's sermon preached to Cornelius and his friends, that is, an abstract or summary of it, for we have reason to think that he used many other words to testify and exhort. It is intimated that he expressed himself with a great deal of solemnity and gravity, but with freedom and copiousness, in that phrase, he opened his mouth, and spoke. God gave unto them, as He did to Ezekiel, the opening of the mouth. This excellent sermon of Peter's is admirably suited to the circumstances of those to whom he preached it.

They were Gentiles that he preached to. He shows that, notwithstanding this, they were interested in the gospel of Christ, which he had to preach, and entitled to the benefit of it, on an equal footing with the Jews. It was necessary that this should be cleared, or else with what comfort could either he preach or they hear? He therefore lays down this as an undoubted principle, that God is no respecter of persons, doth not know favour in judgment.

Deu 1:17 Ye shall not respect persons in judgment; but ye shall hear the small as well as the great; ye shall not be afraid of the face of man; for the judgment is God's: and the cause that is too hard for you, bring it unto me, and I will hear it.

It is often said of God that He does not respect persons,

Deu 10:17 For the LORD your God is God of gods, and Lord of lords, a great God, a mighty, and a terrible, which regardeth not persons, nor taketh reward:

Rom 2:11 For there is no respect of persons with God.

God does not give judgment in favour of a man for the sake of any external advantage foreign to the merits of the cause. God never perverts judgment upon personal regards and considerations, nor countenances a wicked man in a wicked thing for the sake of his beauty, or stature, his country, parentage, relations, wealth, or honour in the world. God, as a benefactor, gives favours

arbitrarily and by sovereignty. *Act 10:35 But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.*

The situation is simple.

God never did, nor ever will, justify and save a wicked Jew that lived and died impenitent, though he was of the seed of Abraham, and a Hebrew of the Hebrews, and had all the honour and advantages that attended circumcision. He does and will render indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, and of the Jew first, whose privileges and professions, instead of screening him from the judgment of God, will but aggravate his guilt and condemnation.

Rom 2:7 To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life: Rom 2:8 But unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, Rom 2:9 Tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile; Rom 2:10 But glory, honour, and peace, to every man that worketh good, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile: Rom 2:11 For there is no respect of persons with God.

God never did, nor ever will, reject or refuse an honest Gentile, who, though he has not the privileges and advantages that the Jews have, yet, like Cornelius, fears God, and worships Him, and works righteousness, that is, is just and charitable towards all men, who lives up to the light he has, both in a sincere devotion and in a regular conversation. Whatever nation he is of, though ever so far remote from kindred to the seed of Abraham, though ever so despicable, nay, though in ever so ill a name, that shall be no prejudice to him. God judges of men by their hearts, not by their country or parentage.

Fearing God, and working righteousness, must go together. Godliness and honesty must go together, and neither will excuse for the want of the other. But, where these are predominant, no doubt is to be made acceptable to God. Not that any man, since the fall, can obtain the favour of God otherwise than through the mediation of Jesus Christ, and by the grace of God in Him but those that have not the knowledge of Him, and therefore cannot have an explicit regard to Him, may yet receive grace from God for His sake, to fear God and to work righteousness; and wherever God gives grace to do so, as He did to Cornelius, He will, through Christ, accept the work of His own hands.

In truth God shows no partiality. This is the foundation for Peter's understanding that the gospel should now go forth to Gentiles. This statement goes completely against the prevailing Jewish thought at that time that God certainly did show partiality, towards the Jews and against the Gentiles. In essence, many Jews of Peter's day thought that God loved the Jews while hating the Gentiles.

According to William Barclay, it was common for a Jewish man to begin the day with a prayer thanking God that he was not a slave, a Gentile, or a woman. A basic part of the Jewish religion in the days of the New Testament was an oath that promised that one would never help a Gentile under any circumstances, such as giving directions if they were asked. But it went even as far as refusing to help a Gentile woman at the time of her greatest need, when she was giving birth, because the result would only be to bring another Gentile into the world.

If a Jew married a Gentile, the Jewish community would have a funeral for the Jew and consider them dead. It was thought that to even enter the house of a Gentile made a Jew unclean before God. Ancient Jewish writings tell us of a Gentile woman who came to a rabbi. She confessed that she was a sinner and asked to be admitted to the Jewish faith. "Rabbi," she said, "bring me near." The Rabbi refused and simply shut the door in her face.

But the Gentiles could give as bad as they got from the Jews. Gentiles despised Jews as weird traditionalists, and believed that they were evil plotters who worshipped pigs. After all, they thought, Jews refused to eat pork, so they must worship pigs!

All of this changed with the spread of the gospel. Christianity was the first religion to disregard racial, cultural and national limitations.

When the Jews showed this kind of partiality they were not being faithful to God's heart as revealed in the Old Testament. The idea that God shows no partiality is also stated before.

Deu 10:17 For the LORD your God is God of gods, and Lord of lords, a great God, a mighty, and a terrible, which regardeth not persons, nor taketh reward: Deu 10:18 He doth execute the judgment of the fatherless and widow, and loveth the stranger, in giving him food and raiment.

2Ch 19:7 Wherefore now let the fear of the LORD be upon you; take heed and do it: for there is no iniquity with the LORD our God, nor respect of persons, nor taking of gifts.

But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him. Peter's point was not to imply that men like Cornelius were already right with God and don't need to become Christians. Instead, the point is that they need not feel excluded from God because of their national background.

God only sees the heart. God does not see economic status, He only sees the heart. He doesn't see nationality or ethnic group, He only sees the heart.

He is Lord of all. This is a powerful phrase, showing the deity of Jesus. Peter could never say this if Jesus were not (and is not) God. Furthermore, He is Lord of all, meaning both Jew and Gentile.

Whom they killed by hanging on a tree, Him God raised up on the third day. Notably, Peter's preaching to the Gentiles was essentially the same as his preaching to the Jews. He presented the person and work of Jesus Christ, with an emphasis on the resurrection of Jesus and our responsibility before God in light of these things.

Peter didn't have one sermon for one group and another sermon for another. All people needed to be saved by coming to a living faith in a living Jesus Christ.

This was always a truth, before Peter perceived it, that God respected no man's person, it was the fixed rule of judgment from the beginning.

Gen 4:6 And the LORD said unto Cain, Why art thou wroth? and why is thy countenance fallen? Gen 4:7 If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him.

God will not ask in the great day what country men were from, but what they were, what they did, and how they behaved towards Him and towards their neighbours, and if men's characters received neither advantage nor disadvantage from the great difference that existed between Jews and Gentiles, much less from any less difference of sentiments and practices that may happen to be among Christians themselves, as those about meats and days. It is certain the kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost, and he that in these things serves Christ is accepted of God, and ought to be approved of men, for dare we reject those whom God doth not?

Now it was made more clear than it had been, this great truth had been darkened by Israel, and the badges of distinction put upon them, the ceremonial law was a wall of partition between them and other nations, it is true that in it God favoured that nation (Rom. 3:1, 2; 9:4), and so particular persons among them were ready to infer that they were sure of God's acceptance, though they lived as they listed, and that no Gentile could possibly be accepted of God. God had said a great deal by the prophets to prevent and rectify this mistake, but now at length He does it effectually, by abolishing the covenant of peculiarity, repealing the ceremonial law, and so setting the matter at large, and placing both Jew and Gentile upon the same level before God, and Peter is here made to perceive it, by comparing the vision which he had with that which Cornelius had.

Col 3:9 Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds; Col 3:10 And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him: Col 3:11 Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all.

Because they were Gentiles inhabiting a place within the confines of the land of Israel, Peter refers them to what they probably already know concerning the life and doctrine, the preaching and miracles, the death and sufferings of our Lord Jesus, for these were things the report of which spread into every corner of the nation. It facilitates the work of ministers, when they deal with such as have some knowledge of the things of God, to which they may appeal, and on which they may build.

They knew in general, the word, that is, the gospel, which God sent to the children of Israel, That word, I say, you know. Though the Gentiles were not admitted to hear it (Christ and His disciples were not sent but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel), yet they must hear of it, it was all the talk both of city and country. We are often told in the gospels how the fame of Christ went into all parts of Canaan, when He was on earth, as afterwards the fame of His gospel went into all parts of the world, Rom. 10:18. That word, that divine word, that word of power and grace, you know.

What the meaning of this word was. God by it published the glad tidings of peace by Jesus Christ, so it should be read. It is God Himself that proclaims *peace*, who justly might have proclaimed war. He lets the world of mankind know that He is willing to be at peace with them through Jesus Christ, in Him He was reconciling the world to Himself. To whom it was sent, to the children of Israel, in the first place. The prime offer is made to them, this all their neighbours heard of, and were ready to envy them those advantages of the gospel, more than they ever envied them those of their law. *Then said they among the heathen, The Lord hath done great things for them*, Ps. 126:2.

The Gentiles knew several matters of fact relating to this word of the gospel sent to Israel.

They knew the baptism of repentance which John preached by way of introduction to it, and in which the gospel first began, Mark 1:1. They knew what an extraordinary man John was, and what a direct tendency his preaching had to prepare the way of the Lord. They knew what great flocking there was to his baptism, what an interest he had, and what he did.

They knew that immediately after John's baptism the gospel of Christ, that word of *peace*, was published throughout all Judea, and that it took its rise from Galilee. The twelve apostles, and seventy disciples, and our Master Himself, published these glad tidings in all parts of the land, so that we may suppose there was not a town or village in all the land of Canaan that had not had the gospel preached in it.

They knew that Jesus of Nazareth, when He was here upon earth, went about doing good. They knew what a benefactor He was to that nation, both to the souls and the bodies of men, how He made it his business to do good to all, and never did hurt to any. He was not idle, but still doing, not selfish, but doing good, did not confine Himself to one place, nor wait till people came to Him to seek His help, but went to them, went about from place to place, and wherever He came He was doing good. Hereby He showed that He was sent of God, who is good and does good, and does good because He is good, and who hereby left not Himself without witness to the world, in that He did good, Acts 14:17. And in this He hath set us an example of indefatigable industry in serving God and our generation, for we came into the world that we might do all the good we can in it, and therein, like Christ, we must always abide and abound.

They knew more particularly that He healed all that were oppressed of the devil, and helped them from under his oppressing power. By this it appeared not only that He was sent of God, as it was a kindness to men, but that He was sent to destroy the works of the devil, for thus He obtained many a victory over him.

They knew that the Jews put Him to death, they slew Him by hanging Him on a tree. When Peter preached to the Jews, he said whom you slew, but now that he preached to the Gentiles it is whom they slew, they, to whom He had done and designed so much good. All this they knew, but lest they should think it was only a report, and was magnified, as reports usually are, more than the truth, Peter, for himself and the rest of the apostles, attested it. We are witnesses, eye-witnesses, of all things which He did, and ear-witnesses of the doctrine which He preached, both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem, in city and country.

They did know, or might know, by all this, that Peter had a commission from heaven to preach and act as he did. This he still harps upon in his discourse, and takes all occasions to hint it to them.

So what must he let them know?

That this Jesus is Lord of all, it comes in a parenthesis, but is the principal proposition intended to be proved, that Jesus Christ, by whom peace is made between God and man, is Lord of all, not only as God over all blessed for evermore, but as Mediator, all power both in heaven and on earth is put into His hand, and all judgment committed to Him. He is Lord of angels, they are all His humble servants. He is Lord of the powers of darkness, for He hath triumphed over them. He is king of nations, has a power over all flesh. He is king of saints, all the children of God are His scholars, His subjects and His soldiers.

That God anointed Jesus with the Holy Ghost and with power, He was both authorized and enabled to do what He did by a divine anointing, whence He was called Christ, the Messiah, the Anointed One.

That God was with Him, Acts 10:38. His works were wrought in God. God not only sent Him, but was present with Him all along, owned Him, stood by Him, and carried Him on in all his services and sufferings.

Because they had had no more certain information concerning this Jesus, Peter declares to them His resurrection from the dead, and the proofs of it, that they might not think that when He was slain there was an end of Him. Probably, they had heard at Caesarea some talk of His having risen from the dead, but the talk of it was soon silenced by that vile suggestion of the Jews, that His disciples came by night and stole Him away. And therefore Peter insists upon this as the main support of that word which preacheth peace by Jesus Christ.

The power by which he arose is incontestably Divine (Acts 10:40). Him God raised up the third day, which not only disproved all the lies and accusations He was laid under by men, but effectually proved God's acceptance of the satisfaction He made for the sin of man by the blood of His cross. He did not break prison, but had a legal discharge. God raised Him up.

The proofs of His resurrection were incontestably clear, for God showed Him openly. He gave Him to be made manifest, to be visible, evidently so, so He appears, as that it appears beyond contradiction to be Him, and not another. It was such a showing of Him as amounted to a demonstration of the truth of His resurrection. He showed Him not publicly indeed (it was not open in this sense), but evidently not to all the people, who had been the witnesses of His death. By resisting all the evidences He had given them of His Divine mission in His miracles, they had forfeited the favour of being eye-witnesses of this great proof of it. Those who immediately forged and promoted that lie of His being stolen away were justly given up to strong delusions to believe it, and not suffered to be undeceived by His being shown to all the people, and so much the greater shall be the blessedness of those who have not seen, and yet have believed. He showed Himself not to the people at large, lest the impious among them should have been loosed from their error, and that faith, the reward of which is so ample. But, though all the people did not see Him, a sufficient number saw Him to attest the truth of His resurrection. The testator's declaring his last will and

testament needs not to be before all the people, it is enough that it be done before a competent number of credible witnesses, so the resurrection of Christ was proved before sufficient witnesses.

They were not so by chance, but they were chosen before of God to be witnesses of it, and, in order to this, had their education under the Lord Jesus, and intimate conversations with Him, that, having known Him so intimately before, they might the better be assured it was He.

They had not a sudden and transient view of Him, but a great deal of free conversation with Him. They did eat and drink with Him after He rose from the dead. This implies that they saw Him eat and drink, witness their dining with Him at the sea of Galilee, and the two disciples supping with Him at Emmaus, and this proved that He had a true and real body. But this was not all, they saw Him without any terror or consternation, which might have rendered them incompetent witnesses, for they saw Him so frequently, and He conversed with them so familiarly, that they did eat and drink with Him. It is brought as a proof of the clear view which the nobles of Israel had of the glory of God (Exod. 24:11), that they saw God, and did eat and drink.

Peter concludes with an inference from all this, that therefore that which they all ought to do was to believe in this Jesus, he was sent to tell Cornelius what he must do, and it is this, his praying and his giving alms were very well, but one thing he lacked, he must believe in Christ.

Observe,

Why he must believe in him. Faith has reference to a testimony, and the Christian faith is built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, it is built upon the testimony given by them. By the apostles. Peter as foreman speaks for the rest, that God commanded them, and gave them in charge, to preach to the people, and to testify concerning Christ, so that their testimony was not only credible, but authentic, and what we may venture upon. Their testimony is God's testimony, and they are his witnesses to the world. They do not only say it as matter of news, but testify it as matter of record, by which men must be judged. By the prophets of the Old Testament, whose testimony beforehand, not only concerning His sufferings, but concerning the design and intention of them, very much corroborates the apostles' testimony concerning them (Acts 10:43), To Him give all the prophets witness. We have reason to think that Cornelius and his friends were no strangers to the writings of the prophets. Out of the mouth of these two clouds of witnesses, so exactly agreeing, this word is established.

What they must believe concerning Him.

That we are all accountable to Christ as our Judge, this the apostles were commanded to testify to the world, that this Jesus is ordained of God to be the Judge of the quick and dead, Acts 10:42. He is empowered to prescribe the terms of salvation, that rule by which we must be judged, to give laws both to quick and dead, both to Jew and Gentile, and He is appointed to determine the everlasting condition of all the children of men at the great day, of those that shall be found alive and of those that shall be raised from the dead. He hath assured us of this, in that He hath raised Him from the dead (Acts 17:31), so that

it is the great concern of every one of us, in the belief of this, to seek His favour, and to make Him our friend.

That if we believe in Him we shall all be justified by Him as our righteousness, Acts 10:43. The prophets, when they spoke of the death of Christ, did witness this, that through His name, for His sake, and upon the account of His merit, whosoever believeth in Him, Jew or Gentile, shall receive remission of sins. This is the great thing we need, without which we are undone, and which the convinced conscience is most inquisitive after, which the carnal Jews promised themselves from their ceremonial sacrifices and purifications, yea, and the heathen too from their atonements, but all in vain, it is to be had only through the name of Christ, and only by those that believe in His name; and those that do so may be assured of it, their sins shall be pardoned, and there shall be no condemnation to them. And the remission of sins lays a foundation for all other favours and blessings, by taking that out of the way which hinders them. If sin be pardoned, all is well, and shall end everlastingly well.

Peter's sermon was a wonderful (if brief and perhaps condensed by Luke) explanation of the person and work of Jesus of Nazareth:

- Jesus was baptized in identification with humanity.
- Jesus was anointed with the Holy Spirit and with power.
- Jesus went about doing good and healing, delivering those oppressed by the devil.
- Jesus did this with the power of God, for God was with Him.
- Jesus did these things in the presence of eyewitnesses.
- Jesus was crucified.
- Jesus was raised from the dead, resurrected in view of many witnesses.
- Jesus commanded His followers to preach the message of who He is and what He did.
- Jesus is ordained by God to be Judge of the entire world.
- Jesus is the one foretold by the prophets.

Even to us who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead. Peter stresses eating and drinking with Christ because that is a way of saying that Christ's was a real resurrection.

"The apostle was not long in his address before he came to the doctrine of the judgment of all men by Jesus Christ. He says that he was commanded to preach it, and therefore he did preach it." (Spurgeon)

Whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins. The brief sermon concluded with an understanding of the broadness of God's promise of salvation. Note it carefully, whoever believes! Jew or Gentile, slave or free, white or black, good or wicked, rich or poor, whoever believes.

What does this mean? Quick and dead? *Act 10:42 And he commanded us to*

preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead. The word quick is perhaps more easily understood as living.

This expression is used a few times.

2Ti 4:1 I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom;

1Pe 4:5 Who shall give account to him that is ready to judge the quick and the dead.

This striking phrase occurs each time denoting that Christ is Judge of all men. Paul wrote to Timothy and Peter wrote concerning the gross Gentile sins from which his readers had been delivered.

The term “quick” is the same as “living.” When Christ returns, the dead in Christ shall rise first” and then all believers, including those still alive in the flesh at His coming and must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ.

1Th 4:16 For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: 1Th 4:17 Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. This will be the judgment of the “quick.”

We have a chilling explanation of the end times, Jesus must also judge the dead, that is, those who are dead in trespasses and sins at the resurrection of damnation.

Joh 5:28 Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, Joh 5:29 And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.

Joh 5:22 For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son: Joh 5:23 That all *men* should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father which hath sent him.

Rev 20:11 And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. Rev 20:12 And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. Rev 20:13 And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. Rev 20:14 And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.

The Holy Spirit Falls on the Gentiles

Act 10:44 While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word. Act 10:45 And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost. Act 10:46 For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God. Then answered Peter, Act 10:47 Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we? Act 10:48 And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then prayed they him to tarry certain days.

Here we see an early example of them and us, the Jews were stunned that the Gentiles would receive a blessing from their Messiah. We have the issue and effect of Peter's sermon to Cornelius and his friends. He did not labour in vain among them, but they were all brought home to Christ.

While Peter was still speaking these words Salvation came when these Gentiles responded to Peter's message with believing faith in their hearts, so that they were actually born again as they listened and believed. "Oh that the Spirit of God would in the same manner interrupt us!" (Spurgeon)

While listening to Peter, these people made a private and invisible transaction in their hearts with God, by putting their faith in Jesus Christ.

The moment of a person's salvation is most likely at the moment they surrender to God and embrace with trust Jesus in the sincerity of their hearts.

Peter allowed the Holy Spirit to interrupt his sermon. The Holy Spirit was doing the greater work in the hearts of those listening, and Peter went with the flow. He stopped and called for their baptism.

The Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word... they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God. Their filling with the Holy Spirit was accompanied by the demonstration of spiritual gifts. This was a filling with the Holy Spirit in two senses, first, in the sense that He indwells and abides in every believer, second, in the sense of a special empowering with gifts and graces from the Holy Spirit.

When they spoke with tongues, it was to magnify God, not to teach men. The audience was God, not man, as is consistent with Corinthians. *1Co 14:2 For he that speaketh in an unknown tongue speaketh not unto men, but unto God: for no man understandeth him; howbeit in the spirit he speaketh mysteries.*

This was unique. It was not common in the Book of Acts or in subsequent Christian experience for those who were not previously converted to instantly be born again and receive such evident spiritual gifts. Yet it was good and even necessary on this occasion, to show that they received the exact same Spirit and the exact same blessing as the apostles and first followers of Jesus did on the morning of Pentecost (Acts Chapter 2).

"The Gentiles are brought into an exactly parallel position, not merely with normal Jews (or even Samaritans) who had believed on Jesus, but with the apostles themselves." (Boice)

Those of the circumcision who believed were astonished. The Jewish Christians present were amazed. They may have understood that God was now starting to love the Gentiles, but who would have thought God would fill Gentiles with the Holy Spirit in the same manner and degree as the Jews?

Peter made the point clearly when he noted that they received the Holy Spirit just as we have. It wasn't just that God loved or blessed the Gentiles that astonished them. It was that God loved and blessed the Gentiles just as He loved and blessed the Jews, and He did it while they were still Gentiles.

He commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. This showed their full acceptance into the community of those who followed Jesus. Their baptism showed they were accepted as Gentile followers of Jesus.

This entrance of Gentiles into the church was not a new plan, but something promised long before. The Old Testament looked for the day when a light would shine in the darkness of the Gentile world.

Isa 60:1 Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the LORD is risen upon thee. Isa 60:2 For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: but the LORD shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee. Isa 60:3 And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising.

God promised Abraham and his descendants that the blessing that came through him would extend to all nations.

Gen 12:1 Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee: Gen 12:2 And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: Gen 12:3 And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.

Here, we see Jesus, the greatest blessing from Abraham extended to the nations.

Remember Jesus' promise in John? *Joh 10:15 As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep. Joh 10:16 And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd.*

Jesus also made another promise. *Joh 12:32 And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.*

The first Gentile Jesus dealt with in His public ministry was a Roman centurion from Capernaum. When Jesus healed that centurion's servant, He declared that many will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 8:5-13).

We should also see that Cornelius was an undoubtedly good man, yet he needed Jesus. Even good people, who are respectful towards God, still need to come to Jesus as their Lord and Saviour, and put all their trust in who Jesus is and what He did for them.

God owns Peter's words by conferring the Holy Ghost upon the hearers of it, and immediately upon the hearing of it (Acts 10:44). While Peter was yet speaking these words, and perhaps wanted to say more, he was happily superseded by visible indications that the Holy Spirit fell on all those who heard the word, even as he did on the apostles at first, so Peter says later. *Act 11:15 And as I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning.* Therefore some think it was with a rushing mighty wind, and in cloven tongues, as that was.

When the Holy Ghost fell upon them, while Peter was preaching, God bore witness to what he said, and accompanied it with a Divine power. Thus were the signs of an apostle wrought among them, 2 Cor. 12:12. Though Peter could not give the Holy Spirit, yet the Holy Spirit being given along with the word of Peter and by this it appeared he was sent of God.

The Holy Spirit fell upon others after they were baptized, for their confirmation, but upon these Gentiles it was before they were baptized, as Abraham was justified by faith, being yet in uncircumcision, to show that God is not tied to a method, nor confines Himself to external signs. The Holy Spirit fell upon those that were neither circumcised nor baptized, for it is the Spirit that quickeneth, the flesh profiteth nothing.

How it appeared that the Holy Ghost had fallen upon them (Acts 10:46). They spoke with tongues which they never learned, when they spoke with tongues, they magnified God. Thus did they on whom the Holy Ghost first descended, Acts 2:11. Whatever gift we are blessed with, we ought to honour God with it, and particularly the gift of speaking, and all the improvements of it.

What an impression it made upon the believing Jews that were present! Those of the circumcision who believed were astonished, those six that came along with Peter, it surprised them exceedingly, and perhaps gave them some uneasiness, because upon the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Spirit, which they thought had been appropriated to their own nation. Had they understood the scriptures of the Old Testament, which pointed at this, it would not have been such an astonishment to them, but by our mistaken notions of things we create difficulties for ourselves in the methods of divine providence and grace.

Peter owns God's work in baptizing those on whom the Holy Ghost fell.

Though they had received the Holy Ghost, it was requisite they should be baptized, though God is not tied to instituted ordinances, we are, and no extraordinary gifts set us above them, but rather oblige us so much the more to conform to them. Some in our days would have argued "These are baptized with the Holy Spirit and therefore what need have they to be baptized with water? It is below them." No, it is not below them, while water baptism is an ordinance of Christ, and a seal of the new covenant.

Though they were Gentiles, yet, having received the Holy Spirit, they might be admitted to baptism, Can any man, though ever so rigid a Jew, forbid water, that

these should not be baptized, who have received the Holy Ghost as well as we? The argument is conclusive, can we deny the sign to those who have received the thing signified? Are not those on whom God has bestowed the grace of the covenant plainly entitled to the seals of the covenant?

Surely those that have received the Spirit as well as we ought to receive baptism as well as us for it becomes us to follow God's indications, and to take those into communion with us whom He hath taken into communion with Himself. God has promised to pour His Spirit upon the seed of the faithful, upon their offspring, and who then can forbid water, that they should not be baptized, who have received the promise of the Holy Ghost as well as we?

Now it appears why the Spirit was given them before they were baptized, because perhaps otherwise Peter could not have persuaded himself to baptize them, any more than to have preached to them, if he had not been ordered to do it by a vision, at least he could not have avoided the disapproval of those of the circumcision that believed. Thus is there one unusual step of Divine grace taken after another to bring the Gentiles into the church. How good is it for us that the grace of God is so much more extensive than the charity of some good men!

Peter did not baptize them himself, but commanded them to be baptized. It is probable that some of the brethren who came with him did it by his order, and that he declined it for the same reason that Paul did, lest those that were baptized by him should think the better of themselves for it, or he should seem to have baptized in his own name.

1Co 1:14 I am thankful that—after your minds were immersed in the truth about God as revealed by Christ—I didn't assist any of you in the symbolic water immersion, except for Crispus and Gaius, 1Co 1:15 so none of you would get confused and think you were immersing your hearts in loyalty to me.

The apostles received the commission to go and disciple all nations. But it was to prayer and the ministry of the word that they were to give themselves. And Paul says *1Co 1:17 For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect.* The business of baptizing was therefore ordinarily devolved upon others, these acted by the orders of the apostles, who might therefore be said to do it. *Qui per alterum facit, per seipsum facere dicitur—What a man does by another, he may be said to do by himself.*

They owned both Peter's word and God's work in their desire for further advantage by Peter's ministry. They prayed him to tarry certain days. They could not press him to reside constantly among them, they knew that he had work to do in other places, and that for the present he was expected at Jerusalem, yet they were not willing he should go away immediately, but earnestly begged he would stay for some time among them, that they might be further instructed by him in the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.

Those who have some acquaintance with Christ cannot but covet more. Even those that have received the Holy Spirit must see their need for the ministry of the word.

In heaven there are no Jews or Gentiles.

